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President: Mr. Holkeri ..... (Finland)

The meeting was called to order at 3 p.m.

Agenda item 9 (*continued*)

General debate

The President: I give the floor to His Excellency the Honourable Elvin Nimrod, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Grenada.

Mr. Nimrod (Grenada): My delegation greets and congratulates you, Sir, for presiding over the deliberations of the fifty-fifth session of the United Nations General Assembly — the Millennium Assembly.

We pay tribute to your predecessor, Mr. Theo-Ben Gurirab, the distinguished Foreign Minister of Namibia, for his effective and dynamic conduct of the fifty-fourth session of the United Nations General Assembly, including the preparations for the Millennium Summit and the President's Report.

Congratulations are also extended to our distinguished Secretary-General, who with great vision conceptualized the Millennium Summit, the execution of which was a great triumph for the United Nations.

A hearty welcome is extended to the small sovereign State of Tuvalu, as it joins the family of nations.

The Millennium Summit and this fifty-fifth session of the United Nations General Assembly are historic events that provide a unique opportunity to view humanity's progress and face the challenges before us.

Indeed, the Summit Declaration sets out a global vision for the twenty-first century. My delegation welcomes the inclusion of commitments to fight poverty, disease, ignorance, injustice, violence and degradation of the environment, among others.

In the matter of poverty and disease, the United Nations must address the inequalities that exist around the world. In this twenty-first century, more than 1.2 billion people live on less than one dollar a day. Millions of children and the elderly go to bed hungry. Disease and sickness wreak havoc on the lives of children, men and women. Today the HIV/AIDS pandemic cuts short the lives of millions of people who could be making useful and productive contributions to our world.

Trade is vital to the livelihood of Grenadians. For the banana-exporting countries of the Caribbean subregion, which includes Grenada, the export of bananas accounts for a significant percentage of foreign exchange. However, our economies are threatened by the callous ruling of the World Trade Organization (WTO) against the European Union banana regime of assistance to our small growers.

Our struggling farmers, with limited acreage, find it difficult, if not impossible, to compete with a transnational corporation. Our farmers need an adjustment period in order to effect the requisite structural changes needed by the new trade regime. We look to the United Nations to call upon the WTO to take into consideration the special structural problems faced by the small banana producers of the Caribbean.

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We call for corporate responsibility. We appeal for measures to encourage the sustainability of small economies and economies in transition. We urge a more equitable global partnership.

You may recall that the Heads of State and Government, including the Prime Minister of Grenada, stressed recently in this very hall the urgency of releasing poor developing countries from their debt burden. The leaders expressed an interest in finding new approaches and new thinking with respect to this problem. A solution should be vigorously pursued with deliberate speed.

Debt forgiveness is not a financial loss to the global economy. Rather, it provides an opportunity for stimulation in the depressed and stagnant parts of the world's economy. Investing the dividends realized by debt forgiveness in the economy of the debtor developing countries — especially the least developed and those with economies in transition — would be a major investment in global development.

Another area that needs urgent and immediate assistance from the international community is that of natural disasters. The costly restoration of infrastructure and rehabilitation of the productive sectors, especially agriculture and tourism, and the high cost of recovering and rebuilding make the attainment of sustainable development a monumental task.

My delegation calls upon the United Nations and its agencies, the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank and other international agencies, as well as the private and public sectors in global partnership, including the Global Compact, to contribute to a well-structured disaster relief fund, a relief fund that can respond quickly and effectively.

A large percentage of the needs of the developing countries in the Caribbean subregion and elsewhere can be met. We look forward to positive developments envisaged from globalization, trade liberalization, information technology and sustainable development. These and other well-conceived programmes must be seriously pursued. Lip service is not enough.

As the Secretary-General noted in his report to the fifty-fifth General Assembly on the work of the Organization: "To some, globalization is imbued with great promise; to others, it appears deeply threatening." (*A/55/1, para. 13*)

The international community must help to ensure that the have-nots are on board this fast-moving train of globalization. All Member States need to share in the opportunities provided by globalization. This would act as a vehicle for international peace and economic security.

Removing some of the barriers to trade and capital flow are prerequisites to successful reduction of poverty and disease in the developing countries. This can be mutually beneficial to developed and developing countries.

Trade has been the engine of economic growth and development from the days of bartering to the present day of e-commerce and globalization. We therefore regard the unilateral interference in our offshore services sector as an attempt to hinder our trade in services and our role in the global economy.

In that connection, my delegation recalls the words of my Prime Minister about the unfair charges levelled against our offshore financial-services sector.

> "A cartel of high-tax nations, comprising the richest and most powerful countries, has launched a destructive and high-powered attack on our country, accusing us of anti-competitive tax practices. Threats, imperialistic pressures and abuse of power in multilateral organizations are being used to force many small States, including Grenada, to give up our fiscal sovereignty. They have used adverse publicity techniques deliberately to condemn and harm our economies. They have threatened various sanctions, sought to block access to capital funds in multinational organizations and to impose financial protectionism and total ostracism."

That is fiscal imperialism. It tramples on the principle of sovereign equality. It is contrary to international law, and it undermines freedom of competition, global investment and trade liberalization.

The role of education in poverty alleviation, in the application of science and technology and in the vast area of information sharing and communications is vital. The Government of Grenada, recognizing the social, cultural and economic potential of education, is investing an increasing proportion of its limited resources to prepare its people to participate in, and benefit from, the information and technology revolution. Towards that end, the Government of

Grenada is seeking the assistance of the United Nations Development Programme, the World Bank and agencies and donors of goodwill to establish a new programme of distance learning by means of global computer interconnectivity.

Grenada attaches great importance to the convening in 2001 of the United Nations High-level Intergovernmental Event on Financing for Development. My delegation welcomes the attempt to address monetary, trade and financial issues in a holistic manner and in the context of globalization and sustainable development. The international community should not miss this opportunity to focus attention and resources on the pursuit of development, peace and stability.

And here, my delegation reaffirms that the root cause of conflict within nations and among nations can be found in some of the injustice done to the weaker members of the international community by the stronger ones. Unless the basics of life — food, clothing, shelter, health and employment — are attained, human rights and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights will be meaningless to those who suffer such extreme deprivations. This is especially so in the context of economic, social and cultural rights, which are downplayed in favour of civil and political rights. Since all human rights are universal, indivisible, interdependent and interrelated, attention to the full range of rights will contribute better to the observance and enjoyment of this noble goal.

I join my Prime Minister in paying tribute to, and publicly thanking, the Government and the people of the Republic of China on Taiwan for the assistance given to Grenada with respect to agriculture, marine resources, education, health, culture and infrastructure. The friendship and sincerity of the Republic of China on Taiwan have been a source of strength and endurance for our two countries. It is in this spirit that Grenada calls once more for the return of the Republic of China on Taiwan to full membership of the United Nations. A people that diligently works to achieve such high levels of human and technological development and a people that makes such positive contributions to the global economy must become a full Member of this great organization, the United Nations.

Finally, we must seek to ensure that the Organization is responsive to the ever-changing global environment. Let us ensure that we address the needs of our peoples. And let us move forward with a United Nations that is prepared to fuel the engine that would bring about more equitable participation in the global community. Let us always put people first and be guided by God.

The President: I now give the floor to the acting Minister for Foreign Affairs of Afghanistan, His Excellency Mr. Abdullah Abdullah.

Mr. Abdullah (Afghanistan): On my way to the Assembly Hall, I was informed by the Supreme State Council of the Islamic State of Afghanistan that in a self-evident act of aggression hundreds of Pakistani military personnel — army, plain-clothes personnel and armed Taliban — are reported to have been positioned in the Shah Salim pass dividing the Pakistan border town of Chitral from north-eastern Afghanistan, bound for an attack on Badakhshan province.

On behalf of my delegation, I take this opportunity to congratulate you, Sir, on your assumption of the major task of presiding over the important millennium session of the General Assembly. I would also like to congratulate the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Namibia, Mr. Theo-Ben Gurirab, on his excellent leadership of the fifty-fourth session of the General Assembly, which set the stage for the Millennium Summit.

Three years ago, I stood before the Assembly and stated from this very rostrum that, as the crisis in Afghanistan continued to unfold, we had to ask, and answer, important questions. At the time, I spoke of the dark and ominous movement known as the Taliban, which, backed by cross-border troops, had invaded Afghanistan. This year, at its millennium session, the General Assembly indeed has to answer major questions. One among many is the silence the world has chosen to keep in dealing with the Taliban and their Pakistani supporters. With the spread of Talibanism, which has led to the abject misery of the Afghan nation, massive insurgency and turmoil in the region and beyond, is it not high time that the international community put a stop to the Pakistani-operated Taliban processing machine? Certainly, mere rhetoric and inadequate reactions are not enough. It is with this view that I should like to focus my statement entirely on the situation in Afghanistan and its devastating regional and international implications, within the given time limit.

A question arises: what has been the result of the Talibanization of the occupied parts of Afghanistan? In an age of information and globalization, it has been a reign of terror imposed by a religious police, abuse in the name of religion, the elimination of all freedoms and civil liberties, massive violations of human rights, degrading and tormenting treatment of men and women, trafficking of women and girls, the forced separation of women from their menfolk, the random and deliberate round-up of individuals based on their ethnic and religious origins, the practice of scorched-earth policy, the torching and total obliteration of farmlands, orchards and other means of livelihood, the contamination of water resources, the forcible dispatch of children and adults to the battlefields, the removal of all but rudimentary religious education — for male students only — with the closure of all schools for females, the deliberate denial of access to humanitarian aid, the intensification of battles, an exacerbation of the situation, widespread terrorism and the destruction of the historical heritage and artefacts of Afghanistan in order to alienate the Afghan nation from its ancestry and historical identity.

The objective of the Pakistani military intelligence establishment, known as Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI), through the imposition of the so-called Islamic Emirate of the Taliban, has been to create instability in Central and South Asia by means of terrorism. This "Islamic Emirate" has instituted Mullah Omar, the militia's leader, as the undisputed Amir-ul-Mo'mineen, meaning "Commander of the faithful" not only in Afghanistan, but in theory throughout the Muslim world.

The process the Pakistani military intelligence has chosen for the realization of its objective is to transform the Afghan nation into an exhausted, devastated, illiterate, ignorant and destitute nation struggling hard for mere survival. Pakistan wants to turn Afghanistan into its false front to mask illicit activities of narcotics trafficking, terrorism and other crimes, as well as religious extremism, by establishing centres and bases for such activities. Attempting to act as the champion of the Muslim world, Pakistan continues to carry out these activities under the name of Islam. It is therefore not a matter of astonishment that such activities have led to the defamation of both the noble religion of Islam and the image of Muslims throughout the world.

In short, the Afghan nation has become the direct victim of the diabolic dreams of the Pakistani military's hegemonic interests in the region. These diabolic dreams are pursued by the Pakistani military intelligence, ISI, an evil and extremist institution, while the implied risk and perilous consequences for the very survival of Pakistan as a State in the future are overlooked.

As the world is gradually awakening to the creeping Taliban threat, it is a matter of dismay that some "civilized" nations, on certain occasions, have preferred to deal with the reclusive and defiant Taliban, an entity which has failed to meet the minimum standard of being considered civilized, while having championed terrorism, human rights violations and crimes against humanity. It is no surprise that only Pakistan's military junta has continuously given its full blessing to the movement.

At least until early May of this year, the official position of Pakistan, from what its diplomats and officials strangely claimed, was that it maintained contacts with both parties to the conflict. However, Pakistan's News Network International (NNI) news agency reported on 25 May 2000 that General Pervez Musharraf claimed that Pakistan's pro-Taliban policy was "in accordance with Pakistan's national interest." Advocating that Pashtoons should be on the side of Pakistan, the General was quoted as saying, "We have a national security interest, both demographic and geographic." He further stated that in the realization of this security interest, "Pashtoons should be on our side and they", meaning Pashtoons, "are represented by Taliban."

The world must know that in a flagrant violation of recognized international norms and principles and in clear contempt of the United Nations Charter, the ruler of the Pakistani military junta, under the outrageous pretext of national security interest, has claimed the right to impose a certain ethnic group through the invocation of an ethnically provocative mandate at the cost of the sovereignty and political independence of Afghanistan, a Member of the United Nations and, prior to that, of the League of Nations, long before Pakistan was even born.

It is important to remember that terrorist training camps operating from the Taliban-held territories of Afghanistan, including those established by the infamous Osama bin Laden, whose dismantling has

been repeatedly called for by the United Nations and the entire international community, have been established by Pakistan's military intelligence through the Taliban mercenaries and other extremist networks. They continue to utilize these territories as a ground for training, sheltering, planning and dispatching elements seeking to commit hostile acts against countries of the region and beyond. This is done under the guise of Islam, but, in fact, it is mainly in pursuit of Pakistani hegemonistic objectives directed towards Afghanistan and the Central Asian Republics. Recent events and activities by extremist groups in Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan are manifest examples of the spillover of the Pakistan/Taliban-supported agenda in the region.

The Islamic State of Afghanistan believes it is high time that the Security Council, in accordance with relevant resolutions, undertook appropriate enforcement measures against Pakistan, which is the prime source of sponsorship of these activities.

The Security Council, in its unanimously adopted resolution 1267 of 15 October 1999, explicitly demanded that the Taliban mercenaries refrain from sheltering, supporting and training terrorists and planning terrorist acts from Afghan soil against other countries and that it extradite to the requesting States those indicted for committing international acts of terrorism.

The recent upsurge of terrorist activities in Central Asian countries and beyond, emanating from the Taliban-occupied parts of Afghanistan, requires drastic measures by the Security Council against the militia and its Pakistani supporters. The consideration of the imposition of further targeted sanctions and the expansion of the scope of resolution 1267 (1999), which must include the end of terrorist activities in all forms and manifestations in the Taliban-held parts of Afghanistan, could adequately, among other things, serve the cause of peace and security in the region.

Here I would like to welcome the proposal by the Republic of Uzbekistan for convening an international conference, at the earliest possible time, to debate the evil phenomenon of terrorism.

In spite of the current devastating drought in Afghanistan — the most severe in 30 years — Afghanistan remains the leading producer of narcotics. The production of illicit drugs, and their trafficking by the Taliban and the politico-military mafia of Pakistan, account for considerable revenue, which is used to finance the prolonged war in Afghanistan. This leads to considerable transnational organized crime, while adding to the number of addicts, both at home and abroad.

Among the many deliberate violations and instances of absolute disregard for international humanitarian law and the numerous crimes against humanity committed by the Taliban and their outside supporters in the year 2000, one could mention the following cases: the cold-blooded killing on 11 May of 198 young Uzbek and Hazara men imprisoned as hostages in Taliban jails; the brutal killing on 5 August of the United Nations mine-clearance employees affiliated with the Organization for Mine Clearance and Afghan Rehabilitation; the deliberate denial of access to humanitarian aid that, according to the European Union, in the light of the devastating drought constituted a breach of international humanitarian law; the forced blood-drawing and organ removal of innocent civilians along the Tagab-Nijrab route in August; the forced deportation of the civilian populations of the city of Aibak on 31 July 2000; the closing down in August, as part of the ongoing four-year campaign by the Taliban to keep women from working, of all bakeries run by the United Nations World Food Programme in which widows were paid to make bread that was then sold at a subsidized price to other widows, who number at least 25,000 in Kabul alone; the indiscriminate aerial bombardment of civilian neighbourhoods at Taloqan on 15 August; and the forcible displacement of hundreds of thousands of people throughout the north due to renewed Taliban military onslaughts.

We believe that the commission of those heinous crimes by the Taliban militia was largely attributable to the lack of adequate response by the Security Council and the international community to bring to justice the perpetrators and others involved in incidents at Bamyan in 1997, at Mazar-e-Sharif and Bamyan in 1998, in the north of Kabul in 1999, and in the killings of Iranian diplomats, a journalist and the military adviser to the United Nations Special Mission to Afghanistan (UNSMA) in 1998.

It is significant to note that the Taliban continue to deprive women of their fundamental rights, including the right to education, which affects over 100,000 female students in Kabul alone. Women are still barred from employment by the Taliban. While the predictable results will speak for themselves, present

and future female generations of Afghanistan will be illiterate. The cultural and social impact of that criminal act on the country's future generations will be enormous.

Pakistani military intervention in Afghanistan is a fact well known to the international community. The hundreds of Pakistani prisoners captured while fighting alongside the Taliban and now in the custody of the Government; the mortal remains of hundreds of Pakistanis in the battlefields and the documents and identification cards obtained from their pockets; the intercepted radio transmissions; and the massive logistical support and the overt supply of large quantities of military hardware and ammunition, all prove the direct involvement of Pakistani army personnel in Afghanistan. In fact, Brigadier General Rustam of Pakistan's armed forces, who is currently stationed in Afghanistan's Kunduz province, commands the Pakistani-Taliban-bin Laden operations in the north. He has been assisted by two of bin Laden's henchmen, Abu Wara and Hubab. All of them were involved in the recent occupation of Taloqan and in the atrocities committed against the civilian population. It is important to mention that the November/December issue of Foreign Affairs magazine has estimated the total number of Pakistanis having fought in Afghanistan since 1994 to be in excess of 80,000.

A breakdown of Pakistani nationals fighting in Afghanistan include the following: Pakistani armed contingents, including units from the North-West Frontier Corps and different commando units, have actively participated in battles on various occasions; Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) officers involved in the planning and command and control of both intelligence operations and logistical support; ex-commissioned officers in charge of tactical operations, artillery support and logistics; frontier militia units; paramilitary members of extremist terrorist groups affiliated with the ISI, such as the Sipah-e-Sahaaba, the Sepah-e-Tayeba, the Harakat-ul-Ansar and so on; and the so-called volunteers from Pakistani madrassas, or religious schools.

Other categories of foreign fighters in Afghanistan include Osama bin Laden's al-Qaeda group and its affiliated units from around the Persian Gulf, the Middle East and Africa, and extremist groups from Central Asia, South Asia and the Far East. In addition, thousands of Afghan refugees who were educated and trained in Pakistani religious schools are dispatched to the battlefronts of Afghanistan. Finally, there are conscripted and forcibly recruited persons from around Afghanistan who are deployed as canon fodder.

In this context, the Islamic State of Afghanistan appeals to the Security Council to mandate the United Nations Special Mission to Afghanistan to dispatch an investigation team to Afghanistan to verify and report to the Security Council on the presence of Pakistani armed men and Arab fighters who are working shoulder-to-shoulder with the Taliban mercenaries. This would break the silence that has thus far encouraged further Pakistani intervention in Afghanistan.

I should like to remind the Assembly that only those Afghans conscripted and forcibly recruited will be immune from prosecution by the Islamic State of Afghanistan for war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide. The rest shall be subject to indictment.

One must conclude that the failure of the Jeddah indirect negotiations in particular, and of other peace initiatives at large, derive from the sad reality that peace has no place in the Taliban agenda.

While striving for the realization of noble human values and principles — the institution of a democratic system, the observance of human rights, including those of women and girls, civil liberties and elections — the Islamic State of Afghanistan reiterates its firm position to strive to reach a peaceful settlement of the conflict and hereby declares its full readiness for the formation of a broad-based, multi-ethnic and fully representative Government through a workable mechanism such as the traditional grand assembly, or loya jirgah, or any other representative forum under the auspices of the United Nations. Meanwhile, as long as Pakistan continues to directly and massively intervene in the internal affairs of Afghanistan, the Islamic State of Afghanistan considers the task of defending the territorial integrity, national unity and political independence of Afghanistan its immediate priority.

The Islamic State of Afghanistan has high expectations that the United Nations and the international community will exert pressure on Pakistan to immediately cease its intervention in Afghanistan and to withdraw all its military personnel and armed nationals from Afghanistan; that the Security Council will address the question of foreign

intervention, the existence of terrorist networks in Afghanistan and the effective implementation of relevant Security Council resolutions; that the Organization of the Islamic Conference will clarify its view of the Taliban's words and deeds — spoken and carried out in the name of Islam — which we believe distort, and are contrary to, the true spirit of Islam, its tenets and injunctions; that the United Nations Drug Control Programme will assist the Islamic State of Afghanistan in the fight against the production and trafficking of illicit drugs; that the United Nations and the international community will step up their efforts for an early and peaceful settlement of the Afghan conflict; and that the international community will provide humanitarian assistance to the war-stricken and drought-hit civilian population of Afghanistan. Here I should like to mention that the current drought, the most severe in 30 years, will have tremendous humanitarian repercussions.

We remain thankful for the statements made by the heads of delegation at the Millennium Summit and in the General Assembly expressing their legitimate concerns over the dangers emanating from the Pakistani Taliban-occupied territories of Afghanistan.

We deeply appreciate and support the indefatigable efforts of Mr. Francesc Vendrell, the Secretary-General's Special Representative for Afghanistan and head of the United Nations Special Mission to Afghanistan (UNSMA), who has left no stone unturned, and no party to the conflict or countries concerned out of communication, in finding a peaceful solution to the Afghan conflict.

I should like to conclude by stating that the United Nations cannot embark on the new millennium without appropriately addressing the issues enshrined in its Charter, among others, the question of non-interference. Neither can this international body advocate globalization in its true sense when Talibanization is threatening regional stability in our part of the world. Certainly the Pakistani military junta will remain the prime actor in this dreadful and immense tragedy in Asia.

Like many others afflicted with the Taliban plague, we wonder how far the evil threat of Talibanism will spread, how many more souls it will bury and how many new borders it must cross before the conscience of the international community is awakened, not just to consider but to adopt immediate and drastic preventive measures.

The Acting President: I give the floor to Mr. Mohammed Said Al-Sahaf, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Iraq.

Mr. Al-Sahaf (Iraq) (spoke in Arabic): It is my pleasure to congratulate Mr. Harri Holkeri on his assumption of the presidency of the fifty-fifth session of the General Assembly, and I should like to convey to him our best wishes for a successful accomplishment of his tasks. I should also like to express our high esteem to his predecessor, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Namibia, who conducted the work of the previous session with notable skill.

The Millennium Summit came to an end just a few days ago. From a certain point of view, it was an occasion for reviewing the state of international relations following the collapse of the bipolar international order. We have taken note of the increasing number of States complaining of the unipolar control over international affairs and the extent of the current and future dangers that this situation can give rise to.

More than 10 years ago, Iraq drew attention to the first signs of many dangers and basic problems that have since grown worse and become the focus of a significant part of the discussions of the Millennium Summit. In February 1990, President Saddam Hussein warned against the grave dangers resulting from the unilateral control assumed by the United States of America and its headlong rush to impose its hegemony on the world in general and on the Arab Gulf region and other Arab countries in particular. He also warned against the dangers posed by that State's recourse to illegitimate and immoral ways and means of achieving that goal, including the use of brute force; the exercise of pressure; political and economic blackmail; interference in the internal affairs of States; the fomenting of racial, religious and sectarian conflicts; and the use of international institutions to serve the interests of American policy.

Iraq also drew attention to the following situations at an early stage.

The first was the exploitation by the industrialized countries, the United States in particular, of scientific and technological progress for political purposes, with a view to engulfing all other countries

of the world in a wave of capitalistic globalization, claiming that globalization is an inevitable fate to which all must submit, regardless of the negative consequences and dangers it entails for the lives of the vast majority of humankind.

Secondly, it drew attention to the adoption of a double standard as far as political positions are concerned, and it noted an indifference to the legal and political standards imposed by internationally binding agreements, where a balance is struck between rights and obligations in the process of the coexistence of interests among various countries, without any distinction or discrimination.

Thirdly, it noted the prevalence of the logic of "power and opportunity" in the exploitation of United Nations mechanisms to ensure the adoption of resolutions supporting the selfish political aims of one country or a few countries at the expense of common principles in international relations, without first giving consideration to obligations undertaken under the Charter of the United Nations and the principles of justice and equity — hence the recourse to mandatory embargoes and comprehensive economic sanctions as a goal in and of itself, as well as the continuation of the policies of starvation and destruction of the economies of various countries and societies.

Fourthly, it drew attention to the imposition on the international community of unilateral policies through mechanisms and arrangements outside the international system, and to the fact that such arrangements were treated as substitutes for the United Nations in those cases where the hegemonic Powers, headed by the United States, expected to meet with strong opposition by the United Nations to those unilaterally determined policies, as we saw in the case of the aggression launched by the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) against the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia.

Fifthly, it noted the phenomenon of the forcible adjustment and adaptation of established rules of international law to serve the unilateral policies of the hegemonic Powers, headed by the United States of America, through the imposition of strange and bizarre interpretations of the contents of such rules, or even total disregard for them when said Powers were unable to impose their strange interpretations thereon. An example of this dangerous phenomenon can be found in the feverish attempts to minimize the importance of the principles of State sovereignty, national independence and non-interference in the internal affairs of states.

Sixthly, it noted the phenomenon of evading responsibility in cases where the assumption of responsibility would not be profitable from an economic point of view, as is the case in questions related to environmental pollution, the expansion of the sphere of poverty in the world and the obstruction of the development of the States of the South, all of which are cases where the responsibility of the advanced industrialized countries is quite obvious.

The dangers, challenges and negative phenomena to which I have referred, as have many other speakers in the course of this general debate, have led to broad reflection on the solutions needed to overcome those difficulties and problematic issues. Iraq is of the view that the starting point is for United Nations actions to be a true expression of the will of all peoples and nations. That is how the Charter of the United Nations was drawn up, in order to establish a system of collective security based on common collective interests. The stability and effectiveness of the system of collective security is based on cooperation among partners and on the basis of specific obligations, not unilateral action and domination, as is the case today. The right of nations and peoples to live in peace and stability is the essential requirement for the maintenance of international peace and security. This right can be guaranteed only if it is firmly linked to the right to economic and social development and to freedom from any kind of pressure or interference.

This noble collective goal can be achieved only by upholding the United Nations system and by reforming and developing that system in order to invest it with the ability and competence to achieve that goal. Reform is particularly called for in the case of the Security Council, which must respect its obligations towards the community of States and must comply with the correct interpretation of the purposes and principles of the Charter in the performance of its functions and the use of its powers. It is also necessary to restore the role of the General Assembly in the maintenance of international peace and security, so as to ensure the necessary balance if the Security Council fails to assume its basic responsibilities under the Charter because of the unilateral and abusive exercise of its powers.

The wave of capitalistic globalization sweeping over today's world continues to widen the gap between the rich and the poor in the world. This dangerous phenomenon requires a forceful call to lay the foundations of a true international partnership in order to re-establish economic and social justice at both the international and national levels, upholding the principle of equitable sharing by all of the fruits of scientific and technological progress, and stopping rich countries from using science and technology as tools for imposing their policies of exploitation on the countries and peoples of the world. A dynamic partnership between the countries of the North and the countries of the South is fundamentally opposed to the logic of domination and unilateral power and to the transformation of science and technology into political tools for the subjugation of others. On the other hand, the call for democratization within countries will remain spurious unless its advocates adhere to a democratic course at the level of dealings with other States and with international organizations. Furthermore, the call for respect for international law and its primacy at the national level will remain devoid of credibility unless it is associated with the kind of conduct that calls for respect for the letter and spirit of the Charter of the United Nations and the rules of international law, and with the possibility of recourse to international judiciary bodies, with regard to the interpretation and application of legal provisions to ensure a delicate balance between powers and responsibilities, rights and obligations. Any affirmation of respect for human rights should not overlook the fact that civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights should, as a matter of equal importance and urgency, enjoy the same respect. Nor should such an affirmation overlook the fact that the world is characterized by cultural and civilizational diversity, and that the cultural and social assumptions tacitly accepted by a given culture cannot be imposed on other nations and peoples.

What I have just stated does not belong to the realm of theory. We in Iraq continue to suffer from the domination and abusive actions of the hegemonic powers headed by the United States of America. Our deep faith in the righteousness of our position explains the steadfastness shown by our country and our people in the face of the might of the unipolar Power.

The comprehensive sanctions imposed on Iraq have entered their eleventh year. By all standards, these sanctions amount to genocide and involve a brutal application of collective punishment and revenge against an entire people. There is no longer any doubt that these sanctions constitute a continued, flagrant violation of the United Nations Charter, of international law and of international humanitarian law. This matter has been confirmed by the reports of United Nations agencies and humanitarian and human rights organizations. The most recent testimony to that effect is to be found in the working paper adopted by the Sub-Commission on the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights at its fifty-second session, held in Geneva from 31 July to 25 August 2000. The paper affirmed that the comprehensive sanctions against Iraq are unequivocally illegal under existing international humanitarian law and human rights laws.

It is well known that both the United States and Great Britain claim that the oil-for-food programme, agreed to between the United Nations and Iraq, alleviates the impact of the unjust sanctions imposed against Iraq. Such a claim, however, is quickly proved to have no basis when set against the figures published by the United Nations itself. More than three and a half years have now passed since the inception of the programme, during which Iraq has exported $31.6 billion worth of oil. Of this total, $9.5 billion has been allocated to the Compensation Fund in Geneva and $1 billion allocated for operational administrative expenses of the United Nations while, in the course of three and a half years, only $8.3 billion has been disbursed for purchases to cover the needs of the Iraqi people.

There are also floating and semi-frozen allocations for certain needs of Iraq amounting to $10 billion that have not been disbursed owing to obstructions placed by the Americans and the British. Such egregious obstructions include the suspension of 1173 contracts, valued at more than $2 billion, relating to construction materials and humanitarian needs.

Despite increasing pressure on the international community to put an end to this ongoing genocide, two permanent members of the Security Council — the United States of America and Britain — insist on perpetuating this crime to further their plans to destabilize the Arabian Gulf region and preserve its hotbeds of tension with a view to prolonging their hegemony over and military occupation of the region and to plundering its wealth.

The United States openly declares that it is prepared to use the veto against any attempt to lift the sanctions imposed on Iraq. It is indeed shameful for the United States that its Secretary of State, Madeleine Albright, has declared on television that the continuation of sanctions is worth the death of 500,000 Iraqi children.

Just to clarify the matter, although the States Members of the United Nations have authorized the Security Council to act on their behalf provided that it do so in accordance with the purposes and principles of the United Nations, pursuant to Article 24 of the Charter, the Security Council has, in the case of the comprehensive sanctions imposed on Iraq, gone so far beyond the purposes and principles of the Charter as to turn itself into a cover for perpetrating a policy of genocide against an entire people. Therefore, it behoves the States Members of the United Nations to voice their opinion as to the extent of the Security Council's faithful compliance with such authorization. In this connection, it is worth mentioning that, under Article 25 of the Charter, Members of the United Nations agree to accept and carry out the decisions of the Security Council in accordance with the Charter. This means that implementation of the comprehensive sanctions imposed on Iraq, which have become illegal under international humanitarian law and human rights law, is no longer binding on States Members of the United Nations.

I must also point out that my country is being subjected to ongoing daily aggression by American and British aircraft in the no-fly zone imposed on northern and southern Iraq by unilateral decision of the Washington and London Governments. The aircraft launching the aggression take off from their bases in Saudi, Kuwaiti and Turkish territory. This continuous military action, which violates the integrity and sovereignty of Iraq's airspace, has no basis in law or in any binding resolution adopted by any competent organ of the United Nations. It constitutes instead an illegitimate unilateral action undertaken by the United States of America and the United Kingdom.

These belligerent acts constitute both interference in the internal affairs of Iraq and ongoing military aggression against Iraq through the imposition of the two no-fly zones. The illegal character of the imposition of those two no-fly zones has been confirmed by official statements issued by the Russian Federation, France and China, which have from the very outset declared their position that the imposition of those zones has no basis in law. This position is also supported by a former Secretary-General of the United Nations who, in his book entitled Unvanquished: a U.S.-U.N. Saga, makes it clear that the American claim that Security Council resolution 688 (1991) authorizes the launching of attacks against Iraq in order to enforce the no-fly zone is baseless and that the enforcement of the no-fly zones, far from having been endorsed by the Security Council, is no more than a unilateral act by the Governments of Washington and London.

The American and British acts of aggression have inflicted enormous material and moral losses on Iraq and gravely damaged its civilian infrastructure. The loss of human life to date has amounted to more than 300 martyrs, while more than 900 civilians have been wounded. The United States of America and Britain bear responsibility for these acts of aggression and for all their consequences, in accordance with the rules of state responsibility under international law. By the same rules, that responsibility is shared by Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and Turkey by virtue of their participation, support and assistance in carrying out these acts of aggression. The Saudi Government provides American and British aggressors with military facilities and the bases of Rafha, Dhahran, Khamis Mushait, Al-Jauf and Tabuk, from which scores of American and British planes take off to attack Iraq. In Kuwait, the rulers provide services, facilities and financing to the American and British aggressors at the air bases of Ali Al Salim and Ahmed Al Jaber.

Iraq has discharged its obligations under relevant Security Council resolutions. Consequently, the logical result would be for the embargo imposed on Iraq to be lifted. Moreover, the Charter requires that the American-British aggression against Iraq be condemned and that its perpetrators and those who participate in it — Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and Turkey — bear the international responsibility, with all its legal implications.

We cannot, under any circumstances, deal with an unjust position that ignores the record of our fulfilment of our obligations and that denies us our legitimate right to have the embargo lifted, as required by the Charter and the correct interpretation of relevant Security Council resolutions. A flagrant example of how the record of the fulfilment of our obligations has been flouted and how our right to have the embargo lifted has been denied is to be found in the

underhanded way by which the United States of America and Britain have made Security Council resolution 1284 (1999) a vehicle for defrauding Iraq of its rights and for misrepresenting its full discharge of its obligations under relevant Security Council resolutions, including in particular resolution 687 (1991). Resolution 1284 (1999) does not represent a solution at all, nor is it, in essence, anything other than a deliberate ploy to further American anti-Iraq policy, as embodied in the indefinite perpetuation of the embargo. We have therefore clearly declared that we shall have nothing to do with that resolution.

The Middle East region is suffering from a grave situation caused by the fact that the Zionist entity that occupies the Arab Palestinian territories possesses a huge arsenal of weapons of mass destruction of all kinds — nuclear, chemical and biological — and long-range ballistic missiles. The Zionist entity occupying Arab Palestine refuses to accede to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons and refuses to place all its nuclear installations under the comprehensive safeguards regime of the International Atomic Energy Agency.

Besides being a threat to peace and security in the Middle East region and the world, such a position exposes the double standard applied by the United States, which at once arms the Zionist entity and gives it unlimited support and deliberately ignores the provisions of paragraph 14 of Security Council resolution 687 (1991). This paragraph specifies that the measures imposed on Iraq should be applied to other countries in the region in order to make the Middle East a zone free of weapons of mass destruction and of all systems of delivery of such weapons, as well as to pursue the goal of imposing international prohibitions against chemical weapons. The Security Council has taken no action in this regard, despite the fact that Iraq has implemented all the required measures. Consequently, the way in which the Security Council has acted under American pressure in this context is a flagrant example of a double-standard policy.

The President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Marc Nteturuye, Chairman of the delegation of Burundi.

Mr. Nteturuye (Burundi) (*spoke in French*): On behalf of the Burundi delegation and on my own behalf, I first congratulate you warmly, Sir, on your election to lead the work of the current session. Your election is an honour and a sign of the great esteem in which the United Nations family holds you and your country, Finland, which maintains friendly, cooperative relations with Burundi.

I would further like to pay a well deserved tribute to your predecessor, Mr. Theo-Ben Gurirab, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Namibia, who masterfully led the work of the previous session. We particularly appreciated his competence, dedication and high level of commitment to successfully fulfilling his mandate.

I also salute the dynamic and innovative work of Mr. Kofi Annan, the Secretary-General, to achieve peace, security and development throughout the world. My delegation greatly appreciates his report, "We the peoples: the role of the United Nations in the twenty-first century", which undertakes a painstaking and uncompromising analysis of the great challenges of these times and proposes an approach to overcoming them so that it will be possible to live in a world free from want and fear, in a world that meets our aspirations.

Finally, it is my pleasure to welcome warmly Tuvalu as a new Member of our Organization, and at the same time to congratulate it on its wise decision to our ranks at this beginning of the new millennium.

My delegation unreservedly supports and endorses the Millennium Declaration, adopted by our heads of State and Government on 8 September 2000. We very much hope that its pertinent recommendations, made by almost all the world's leaders, will not become a dead letter. The United Nations, and each country in particular, must implement the appropriate strategies to translate the recommendations into concrete actions that can improve the future of our populations and peoples — in particular the most disadvantaged.

At one of the meetings of the Millennium Summit, which concluded on 8 September 2000, the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Cooperation of Burundi, speaking on behalf of the head of State, stated:

"The Burundian people are in the process of turning a page in their history. The agreement on peace and national reconciliation was signed on 28 August in Arusha, Tanzania, before the eyes of the entire world, which hailed the occasion. This was a qualitative leap

forward towards a better future for the Burundian people." (*A/55/PV.7*)

Later the Minister said, however:

> "Everything has not yet been resolved ... the greatest remaining challenge is ending the war, without which the implementation of the agreement is practically impossible." (*ibid.*)

The end to the war was to have been negotiated yesterday, 20 September, at a meeting scheduled in Nairobi between the Government and the rebels, and before the heads of State of the region. The President of the Republic himself represented the Government. The heads of State of the region and, of course, the mediator were also there. The three political parties that had not signed the 28 August peace agreement were also there, and they signed the agreement. Thus the maximum number of parties have now accepted this agreement.

As for the rebels, only one movement, the FNL, was represented by its leader. The head of the other movement — the CNDD-FDD, which is the more important group — did not make the trip. The two movements refused to negotiate anything or to meet with the Government delegation. Rather, they contented themselves with repeating their preconditions and pleading that they had to consult their rank and file before making any commitments.

Thus the meeting was a failure. The hopes of the Burundi people of seeing the violence come to an end were dashed. The implementation of the peace agreement has been called into question. The signatories to the agreement on peace and national reconciliation — negotiated two years ago — are now accused of being traitors and men of straw, and are being asked to return to the negotiating table. Those taking part in the rebel uprising go so far as to call into question the good faith of the leaders who sponsored the negotiations and the signing of the peace agreement.

Before denouncing the 28 August peace agreement, the rebel uprising had hidden itself behind a series of preconditions for the ceasefire negotiations. The two principal preconditions were as follows.

The first precondition was the dismantling of the regroupment camps. This precondition has been meaningless since 31 July 2000, because the Government had committed itself to dismantling the camps by that date, and it kept this promise, as the United Nations has confirmed on the basis of reports from its agencies working in the field in Burundi. The facilitator, Mr. Nelson Mandela, himself publicly reaffirmed these reports during the signing of the peace agreement on 28 August.

The second precondition related to the release of political prisoners — an issue that has been the source of a great deal of disagreement between the negotiating parties. But since then, thanks to the compromise that the parties have reached, contained in article 15 and point 20 of the second protocol to the peace agreement, the current Government can create an independent commission to look into, inter alia, the issues of prison conditions and political prisoners.

Mr. Vohidov (Uzbekistan), Vice-President, took the Chair.

That is why it has just asked the Secretary-General to send to Burundi a team of experts in criminal law to inquire freely into the existence or non-existence of political prisoners in Burundi. It is no longer possible to deal with this question outside of the peace agreement unless one wants to imperil the entire peace process. The Government and the people of Burundi were very grateful for the opportunity they had to explain to the Facilitator during his two visits to Burundi how delicate the problem was.

Burundians suffer enormously from war; they want finally to breathe the air of peace. Deadly, wanton ambushes against people travelling on the roads, attacks on innocent people in the hills and in the displaced persons camps, theft of livestock, destruction of houses, crops, social infrastructure and so on — all of this must stop so that, finally, our country can regain its peace and tranquillity.

Setting conditions to halt violence is cruel, and the international community must condemn this attitude and those responsible for it. Given the intransigence of the rebels, the Government of Burundi calls upon the region and the international community to implement the provisions of article 2 of the peace agreement, which states that if the armed groups of the non-signatory parties reject the invitation made in the agreement to suspend hostilities and to start negotiations for a ceasefire, the guarantors of the agreement, particularly the Governments of neighbouring States, and the international organizations will take "the necessary steps to stop,

demobilize, disarm and, where appropriate, arrest, detain and repatriate the members of these armed groups and, furthermore, take all appropriate steps against any party which encourages and supports such activities".

In the absence of a ceasefire not only do the innocent continue to die, but also the refugees and displaced persons cannot return home; assistance to rebuild the country cannot begin; and even the transitional institutions established cannot function properly. Why is the international community silent when two armed movements are holding hostage an entire people that had pinned so many hopes on the peace agreement which has now been signed by 19 out of 19 parties — in other words, all of the negotiators?

The Government, as it has often repeated, is prepared to negotiate directly with the rebels and to conclude the ceasefire agreement as soon as possible. It will also continue to explain the peace agreement to the people so that they will support its contents and its programme. It is also continuing consultations in order to arrive at compromise solutions regarding the reservations expressed by certain parties about the agreement and other questions that are still pending.

We would be deluding ourselves if we said that Burundi will attain peace and security without a favourable environment in the subregion and in Africa in general. Unfortunately, nothing leads one yet to hope that peace will be established in the Great Lakes region any time soon. The Lusaka agreements signed in August 1999 still offer a few glimmers of hope before actually entering into force. However, they are an important basis for the resolution of the conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The summit that took place, again in Lusaka, on 14 and 15 August 2000 unfortunately ended in failure, even though it was one more chance to establish the basis for peace. However, a lost opportunity should not discourage us. We would like here to say that we very much support President Frederick Chiluba of the Repuolic of Zambia for his tireless efforts to find a solution to the question of the Congo, and we encourage him to persevere.

Contrary to the allegations made by the head of the delegation of the Democratic Republic of the Congo from this rostrum on 16 September, I wish to reaffirm that the only interest of my country, Burundi, is to maintain security over our borders. We have no other ambitions, political or economic, with regard to any neighbouring country. And we hope that the same applies to our neighbouring countries, in particular those who give refuge to and assist the Burundian rebels.

Each country, and the subregion in general, must focus on problems of development. The ideology of genocide, which is undermining the entire Great Lakes region, and the many armed rebellions by those who champion that ideology, will be overcome only through the concerted and determined efforts of all States of the Great Lakes region, with the active support of the international community.

In this context, the conference on peace, security and development for the Great Lakes countries, envisaged for several years now, can be successful only if each country of the region makes a meaningful effort to improve their domestic policies.

By holding the Millennium Summit, the United Nations chose a very opportune moment to discuss the great challenges that await us in the coming century: peace, security and disarmament, on the one hand, and development and the eradication of poverty, on the other.

As is so well summarized by the Secretary-General in his report, we must live free from fear and free from want. Although these two goals are the very essence of our Organization, it must be stated that, unfortunately, we are still wide of the mark. Fratricidal wars continue to break out in various parts of the world and it takes too long to put the fires out. Conflicts break out on the borders of neighbouring countries, and entire communities are forced into exile. Given the multitude of these conflicts and their complexity, the international community has only a mixed record of success. Like other heads of delegations that have preceded me, I am inclined to wonder why our Organization does not do better in preventing and resolving conflicts and in peacekeeping.

On this subject, we very much support the implementation of the valuable recommendations in the Brahimi report, which was the outcome of an in-depth study at the request of Mr. Kofi Annan on the activities of the United Nations in the area of peace. We welcome the steps already taken by the Secretary-General to prepare a detailed plan for the implementation of these recommendations.

If our Organization were to engage in some self-questioning, we would probably find that one of the primary causes for failure lies in the very functioning of the United Nations. The Security Council decides on everything, and it decides too slowly. In the face of urgent situations, there is too much procrastination due to political expediency which is very often insufficiently understood by the international community.

Over the last fifty years, it is the same people who decide the fate of humanity while safeguarding the interests of some States as a matter of priority. People who seek urgent assistance thus have the impression that they are being held hostage or are being abandoned to their fate because international solidarity, so keenly awaited, does not materialize. My delegation, therefore, reiterates the hope that we will re-think the functioning, composition and attributes of the Security Council in order to revitalize it and to adapt it to this ongoing state of change.

The question of the equitable representation of all regions of the world on the Security Council and the question of increasing the number of members, both permanent and non-permanent, deserve our attention. They are in tune with the imperatives of democracy and legitimacy in making decisions in this highly important Organization — the United Nations. Only such a reform can restore the confidence of all Member States in reviving the force of law in international affairs, because today, weak nations are confronting, basically, the law of force.

In order to do this the establishment of the International Criminal Court, the Statute of which was adopted in Rome in 1998, will, I am sure, be a useful tool to combat impunity.

Although sanctions fall exclusively within the competence of the Security Council, from 31 July 1996 until January 1999, Burundi lived under a regime of economic sanctions imposed by neighbouring countries, which was in violation of the United Nations Charter because it was not an initiative of the Security Council. As has been pointed out, such sanctions have proved to be both unfair and counterproductive. Because of the adverse effects of these sanctions in the economic and social area, those who suffer the most are innocent people — the elderly, women and children. The Security Council should therefore resort to targeted sanctions only in serious and exceptional circumstances when other methods of pressure have failed, in order to avoid causing harm to the entire population.

The other major obstacle to world peace is the proliferation of light weapons — paradoxically, in poor countries. Only with the combined efforts of all States will we be able to deal with this phenomenon, because arms manufacturers and merchants form a worldwide network that represents big financial interests. Any peacekeeping programme should therefore include, as a matter of priority, the monitoring of flows of light arms, since it is such weapons that are used by most clandestine movements to cause death and destruction through terrorism.

Furthermore, fear cannot be dispelled from the world as long as competition to produce weapons of mass destruction continues. Our Organization should do everything it can to bring about complete global denuclearization in the medium term. This standing threat to humanity undermines all hopes for a world of peace, to which the founding fathers of our world Organization aspired.

Those with the responsibility of governing some of the poorest countries in the world appreciate, on a daily basis, just how hard it is to ensure that peace can prevail in a community that is bereft of food and other basic needs. A proverb in our national language, Kirundi, says, "If you go to sleep with an empty stomach, you will wake up with a heart full of hatred". It is no secret that the world has an abundance of riches and resources of all kinds. But that does not prevent people in some parts of the world from dying of hunger or malnutrition, while their fellow human beings in other parts of the world — and sometimes even in their own countries and cities — are wallowing in luxury. This means that true cooperation is the kind that encourages growth in production and income to enable people to take control of health, education, nutrition and decent housing. By giving greater assistance to the poorest countries, the rich countries would be working not only for a fairer world but for greater security for their own people.

The millennium report of the Secretary-General, submitted under agenda item 49 (b) of the fifty-fourth session, rightly stresses the seriousness of the tragedy caused by the HIV/AIDS pandemic throughout the world, focusing particular attention on Africa. Of the 36 million people who are HIV-positive, more than 23

million are in sub-Saharan African. According to that report, in the same region, more than one child in ten has lost its mother to AIDS. The very pessimistic prediction has been made that by 2010 there will be 40 million orphans. Burundi has not escaped this dangerous epidemic, which appeared at the beginning of the 1980s and is continuing to cause devastation today, particularly among the most active and, therefore, the most productive people.

In the meantime, with the assistance of the World Health Organization, the United Nations Children's Fund and other actors, to which we extend our heartfelt thanks, my Government has launched a robust prevention policy against HIV/AIDS. A special fund has been established to combat this scourge, which could decimate entire generations. That is why we endorse the recommendations of the Secretary-General to reduce the HIV infection rate, particularly by increasing access to information, education and health services for people who are already infected. At the same time, we recommend that the pharmaceutical industry be provided with all the financial support necessary to develop an effective and affordable vaccine to eradicate this scourge by the end of the century.

Before we can be sure of having built a more secure and prosperous world, we must be mindful of the need to bequeath to our children an environmentally balanced planet. Unfortunately, we have to say that the industrial progress that was supposed to have generated prosperity is making our natural environment increasingly unhealthy. We must, as a matter of urgency, control the quality of industrial production and the phenomenon of population growth, particularly in urban areas, if we wish to safeguard quality of life for future generations.

We have often behaved as if nature would remain healthy without our making any effort. Today, desertification is a threat to many countries that used to be covered with vegetation. Drought has invaded regions that used to be crossed by great rivers and streams. In those places where there is still enough water, it takes millions of dollars to treat it to make it potable.

My delegation would like to reiterate the Secretary-General's appeal to all Member States at the Millennium Summit to fund an assessment of ecosystems before it is too late. The result would no doubt be a clear, realistic programme to protect our environment.

Despite the difficult situation in which we have been living for several years, Burundi, in close cooperation with other Member States, will work steadfastly to achieve the goals pursued by our Organization. We hope that the United Nations will adapt to current challenges and to changing international relations for the benefit of all humankind.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Hussain Shihab, Chairman of the delegation of Maldives.

Mr. Shihab (Maldives): Allow me at the outset to associate myself with previous speakers in congratulating Mr. Holkeri on his election to preside over the General Assembly at this historic session. It is a tribute to his distinguished political experience and to the invaluable contributions made by his country, Finland, to the work of our Organization.

I should also like to extend my appreciation to his predecessor, Mr. Theo-Ben Gurirab, the Foreign Minister of Namibia, for the excellent manner in which he discharged his responsibilities during the fifty-fourth session.

I would also like to pay a special tribute to our Secretary-General, Kofi Annan, for the inspirational leadership and the moral authority he has brought to our Organization. His report to the Millennium Summit, "We the peoples", will remain a powerful and luminous beacon as we strive to make the world a more just and peaceful place for future generations and the United Nations a more effective, efficient and responsive Organization in the new millennium.

Exactly 35 years ago today, Maldives was admitted to the United Nations. We were proud to take a seat in this world body, which has seen steady growth in its membership, activities and influence. Today, we are pleased to welcome to our midst the island nation of Tuvalu. We look forward to working with Tuvalu in furthering the cause of small island nations for a more economically humane and socially just world that is environmentally sustainable in the future.

Wars, hunger and famine have marred much of the twentieth century. Terrorism, drugs and the spread of HIV/AIDS threaten to destroy the peace and prosperity of our future generations. Economic inequality and social injustice have tended to increase,

despite many laudable efforts to the contrary. As technological advances bring untold riches and opportunities to many, many more continue to live in deprivation, their lives becoming increasingly marginalized in a fast-changing world.

Only a few days back, the Millennium Summit brought together the largest-ever gathering of world leaders in human history. It was not only a historic occasion but also one that rekindled the hopes and aspirations of the world's peoples. The Millennium Declaration adopted at the Summit charts out a future vision for the world in which "the peoples" have rightfully been given pride of place in our efforts to reshape the future of humanity. As my President, President Abdul Gayoom, stated at the Millennium Summit, "The gap between expectation and result must be eliminated" (*A/55/PV.3*) in the new millennium.

The leaders of the world have recognized the dangers posed to the future of humanity. They have pledged themselves to a better world — a world that is more just, a world in which every human being can live in dignity, a world that rejoices in its diversity of races, religions and culture. They have pledged to strengthen the United Nations so that it may have the resources and capability to deliver the dreams of "we the peoples" of the world. It now remains for us to translate these words into deeds, rhetoric to reality. Action must begin now.

For over two decades, Maldives has managed to make significant economic and social progress. We are indeed proud of what we have achieved with the limited resources at our disposal. A stable political environment, a supportive international community and the creativity of our people have combined to help our economic growth. However, this does not reduce in any way the vulnerability of our economy. We continue to have a small and narrow economic base comprising fisheries and tourism, both of which are extremely susceptible to external forces that are often beyond our control. Indeed, the precarious nature of our economy is readily evidenced whenever the price of tuna plunges in the international market. Similarly, any downturn in the economy of major tourist markets or regional instability casts a long shadow on our tourist industry.

We do not want to wear the least developed country label for ever. As a small but proud nation, we, too, would like to be a self-reliant country. National pride, unfortunately, does not feed our population or educate our children. It is for these reasons that during the Economic and Social Council meeting in July this year, Maldives argued against its removal from the list of least developed countries, which would undoubtedly pull the rug from underneath our feet. Indeed, our successes in national development to date have been highly dependent on the concessional finance and developmental assistance we have enjoyed as a least developed country. The withdrawal of access to such concessional assistance at this crucial stage of our development would seriously cripple our developmental efforts. Our economy will slide backwards if we lose preferential access to markets. Our debt burden will become unsustainable.

We take some comfort in the decision made by the Economic and Social Council to defer the consideration of the recommendation to graduate Maldives from the list of least developed countries. The structural impediments facing our developmental efforts are so formidable that the country's graduation at this stage is not justified. Our geophysical fragmentation, combined with remoteness from major markets, accentuates our vulnerabilities, many of which are unique. Maldives is not simply an island nation; it is a nation of islands. In fact, we have over 1,100 small, low-lying islands. Our population is scattered over 198 islands, each of which needs to be provided with adequate administrative and socio-economic infrastructure. Poor and porous soil conditions prohibit most agricultural production, while avenues for economic diversification are extremely limited. Transport and communication costs are prohibitive. That is why we have appealed to the international community to take a closer look at our situation and re-examine the issue of our graduation from the list of least developed countries. We hope the international community will understand and support our cause.

Since the adoption of the Barbados Programme of Action, the small island developing States have been waiting for the international community to meet the pledges made at the Conference on small island developing States, while their economic and ecological challenges have increased manifold. We therefore are happy that the world leaders at the Millennium Summit have once again highlighted the special needs of small island developing States, including the necessity of developing a vulnerability index that can truly capture the unique features of these States. The leaders have

also resolved to implement rapidly and in full the Barbados Programme of Action and the outcome of the twenty-second special session of the General Assembly. These are welcome developments which we hope will soon be translated into action by the international community.

Allow me to stress the importance of the early completion of the vulnerability index called for by this Assembly. In developing this index, we believe, the international community should take into account not only those factors that are similar among the island States but also those that are unique to particular island States. For example, while some may be prone to cyclones and hurricanes, others may be more affected by beach erosion or coral bleaching.

Maldives has consistently voiced its concerns over the negative impact of environmental degradation on small island States. We welcomed the adoption of the Kyoto Protocol. Unfortunately, the slow pace of its ratification by the international community continues to endanger many small island developing States. It is indeed regrettable that to date only 23 countries have ratified the Protocol.

We are, however, heartened by the fact that the Millennium Declaration calls upon the international community to expedite the early ratification of the Kyoto Protocol to ensure its entry into force by the tenth anniversary of United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in 2002. We call upon the United Nations to take a leading role in making the relevant resolve of our leaders at the Summit a reality. As the President of the Maldives, speaking at the Millennium Summit, declared,

"Humanity's quest for progress must be sustainable. We have no right to destroy the Earth. Ecological damage must be stopped. Global warming must be curbed. All low-lying countries must be saved." (*A/55/PV.3*)

The protection and security of small States continue to constitute an issue of critical concern to my country. Among the 189 Members that compose the United Nations today, many are small countries which require protection from a variety of threats to their security. The Maldives believes that within the sphere of international peace and security, which has always remained a high priority on the United Nations agenda, the security of small States should continue to receive special consideration as a political and moral obligation of the international community. The interest and concern of the United Nations on this issue should not be allowed to diminish, even in the future.

Globalization is today a reality. No country, large or small, can swim against the tide of globalization and the digital revolution that is reshaping the modern world. Globalization must benefit all countries. Its costs must be shared evenly by all countries. The least developed countries must be granted duty-free and quota-free access to the markets of developed countries for their exports. They deserve debt relief, including debt cancellation, in return for demonstrable commitments to poverty reduction. Development assistance needs to be increased. We remain hopeful that the Third United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries, to be held next year, will usher in a new era of development for the least developed countries.

During the course of last year, the United Nations was able to record some important achievements. The follow-up sessions to the world conferences on women and on social development reaffirmed the goals of creating a more just and tolerant society. Modest but significant progress was achieved by the Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons towards freeing the world from the scourge of nuclear arms. Efforts towards the establishment of an International Criminal Court are moving ahead. A valuable framework for strengthening United Nations peacekeeping operations has been laid out by the Brahimi report (*A/55/305*).

Yet many shortcomings and frustrations continue to plague the world community. Conflicts based on ethnic arrogance rage on. Poverty persists at a level that is morally repugnant. The spread of the HIV/AIDS pandemic needs to be urgently addressed. International peace and security continue to be threatened by terrorism and drug trafficking cartels operating within and across borders.

A comprehensive and permanent peace settlement in the Middle East continues to elude us. This is disappointing. We would like to reiterate our full support for the cause of the Palestinian people and to encourage the sponsors of the peace process in the Middle East to continue to pursue their efforts towards achieving a lasting peace in the region.

The situation in the Gulf continues to trouble us. Peace, progress and security in that region can never be

achieved unless settlements on all unresolved issues are complied with fully by all the parties concerned in conformity with the relevant United Nations resolutions. We would like to reaffirm our unwavering support for the independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity of Kuwait. As I mentioned before, we continue to believe that the United Nations has an obligation to uphold the security and territorial integrity of all Member States, including small States.

The Maldives firmly believes that the myriad challenges facing the world today can be effectively addressed only in a multilateral framework in which the United Nations must play the central role. Despite the many shortcomings it may have, the United Nations remains the only truly universal organization where global issues can be addressed. We believe that an increasingly interdependent world calls for a strengthened multilateral system with an effective international legal regime that is respected by all nations. It is with this conviction that the Maldives has become a State party to a number of international conventions and treaties, including the eight conventions and treaties to which we became party during the Millennium Summit, taking advantage of the opportunity offered by the Secretary-General.

We fully support the steps being taken by the Secretary-General in the process of reforming our Organization. While there has been much progress, more remains to be done. Reform of the Security Council to reflect the political reality of the modern world is essential if the United Nations is to remain a credible and effective organization, enjoying the confidence of the peoples of the world. Reform of the United Nations must aim at enhancing the legitimacy of the Organization, making the United Nations more democratic and transparent, and reinforcing the ability of the United Nations to uphold equality among nations.

At the Millennium Summit, our leaders illuminated the way forward. It now remains for us to move forward in concert, for the benefit of the peoples of the world.

The Acting President: I give the floor to the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Zimbabwe, His Excellency Mr. Stanislaus Mudenge.

Mr. Mudenge (Zimbabwe): I wish to congratulate Mr. Harri Holkeri of Finland on his election to the presidency of this historic session of the General Assembly. I also take this opportunity to congratulate his predecessor, my dear brother and colleague, Mr. Theo-Ben Gurirab, the Foreign Minister of Namibia, on a job well done.

Zimbabwe joins other Members of the Assembly in welcoming the admission of Tuvalu as the one hundred and eighty-ninth Member State of the United Nations.

Since a Millennium Assembly can only come once in a lifetime, it is my singular honour and pleasure to address this Assembly. The twentieth century was probably the most eventful in the history and the experience of Zimbabwe. As we enter the twenty-first century and the new millennium, the people of Zimbabwe, in a very symbolic and yet historic way, find themselves concluding painful chapters of their experience, whose closure is critical to the laying of a foundation for a better future.

Structural inequalities are a fundamental reality of Africa's colonial past, which many countries like my own are grappling with to this day. In my country 70 per cent of Zimbabwe's best arable land is still controlled by less than 1 per cent of the population — roughly 4,500 settlers or their descendants. This is in a country of nearly 13 million people. It is a historical fact that the colonial regime forcefully robbed us of this land without paying us any compensation. As I speak, the Government of Zimbabwe is in the process of taking back 5 million of the 12 million hectares of our prime land to settle landless peasants.

Zimbabwe's land reform programme is meant not only to correct the wrongs wrought on our society by colonialism, but also to restore our people's heritage and basic means of subsistence and economic participation. In this endeavour, we have received neither the cooperation of those sectors of our society to which colonialism bequeathed special privileges, nor the acknowledgement or support of former colonizers who willed those privileges. In pursuit of their policies, those powerful interests have employed their financial might, as well as their control of the media to not only choke our economy but also to demonize us before the world.

We cannot, in one breath, pay lip service to human rights, equality and poverty eradication and, in the next, defend inequality, which condemns the majority to a life in squalor. We invite all our partners to see through the veil of the negative and racist media

blitz, acquaint themselves with our people's real need for justice, restoration and agrarian reform and help us remove the barriers that constrain poor people's ability to benefit from their economy and to contribute to its growth.

Our determination to undertake land reform in Zimbabwe is one of the "crimes" cited in the so-called Zimbabwe Democracy Act 2000, which was passed by the United States Senate in June this year and is before Congress as I speak. It proposes to prescribe the outcome of our land reform exercise and seeks to virtually usurp the authority of the Parliament of Zimbabwe. Most ironically, the so-called Democracy Act proposes to authorize the investment of United States funds of around Z$ 300 million in the breeding of opposition parties in Zimbabwe. That amount, which is exclusively for opposition parties, is more than four times the Z$70 million distributed by the Zimbabwean fiscus among all political parties that have a stipulated threshold representation in Parliament. Are we expected to just stand idly by and watch helplessly as our destiny is determined from outside our country? Where, I ask, is our self-determination and our sovereignty, for which so much blood and so many lives were sacrificed by our people?

The measure seeks to hurt Zimbabwe's fortunes even further by issuing United States directors at the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank with standing directives to vote against Zimbabwe at every opportunity. This means that even if Zimbabwe met all macroeconomic requirements and exercised the requisite fiscal discipline it would still be disqualified in its quest for assistance from the Bretton Woods institutions, on the basis of political considerations that are totally extraneous to the stipulated technical criteria.

Just what are the rules of the game, and to whom are these international financial institutions accountable? Do we need any further justification for the resounding call for a new international financial architecture? For while the current international financial architecture is subservient to the interests of the rich and the strong, even to the satisfaction of their last extraterritorial exploit, it remains for ever insensitive to the survival needs of the small, the weak and the poor.

Zimbabwe's involvement in the Democratic Republic of the Congo to help prevent mayhem, bloodshed and the overthrow of a legitimate Government there is another "crime" cited in the Zimbabwe Democracy Act 2000. At the invitation of the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Zimbabwe, together with other allies of the Southern African Development Community (SADC), sent troops to the Democratic Republic of the Congo to help fend off an invasion by two of that country's neighbours. The responsive intervention of the SADC allies effectively contained the situation and established the relative calm and stability prevailing in the Democratic Republic of the Congo today. It also paved the way for the peace process that culminated in the signing last year of the Lusaka Ceasefire Agreement, which, all involved agree, offers the best hope for establishing and maintaining peace in the region.

What does Zimbabwe get in return for its sacrifices in upholding the principles of the United Nations Charter? Sanctions and threats of more sanctions are the response. For helping to create the very conditions that enabled the United Nations to set foot in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Zimbabwe is today questioned, tried and sentenced to pariah status. Some of the proponents of the Zimbabwe Democracy Act 2000 have demanded that Zimbabwe withdraw its troops from the Democratic Republic of the Congo before they can even consider withdrawing that measure.

Are we being punished for creating conditions that enabled the United Nations and other humanitarian agencies to deliver assistance to Congolese communities? Are we being vilified for enabling thousands of Congolese children to get polio vaccinations and other types of life-saving immunization? After offering our partnership in the quest for peace and human well-being, we expect the international community to respond accordingly and cooperate with us.

Instead of punishing those who invaded the Democratic Republic of the Congo, instead of censuring those who are violating the national sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, in blatant desecration of cardinal principles of the Charter, instead of questioning those who are already in contempt of Security Council orders to withdraw immediately from the Democratic Republic of the Congo, some members of the international community have chosen, rather, to

victimize Zimbabwe, whose troops are in the Democratic Republic of the Congo at the invitation of the Government of that country. Exactly what outcome does the international community wish to see in the Democratic Republic of the Congo?

I reiterate, and categorically so, that Zimbabwe is committed to the Lusaka Ceasefire Agreement and to Security Council resolutions adopted on this question. In this regard, Zimbabwe is ready to immediately withdraw its troops from the Democratic Republic of the Congo, under the Lusaka Ceasefire Agreement, as soon as the United Nations deploys peacekeepers in that country. We therefore urge the Secretary-General to deploy the observer mission already authorized by the Security Council as part of phase two deployment, so that we can move to phase three and the deployment of actual peacekeepers in order to enable us to leave the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Like their neighbours in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the peace-loving people of Angola are victims of an imposed war that has been fomented by greed rather than grievance. While the crisis is far from resolved, we are mollified by the position taken by the Security Council, through the Angola sanctions Committee, to ensure the effective application of the embargo against UNITA. We support the Secretary-General's stance of naming and shaming the violators of sanctions as a way of preventing the opportunism and greed that fan conflicts. This was the position adopted by the Organization of African Unity (OAU) at its last summit, in Lomé, Togo.

In both the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Angola, we challenge the United Nations, and the Security Council in particular, to come to the aid and defence of the innocent victims of war, to protect their natural heritage and resources from pillage, and to safeguard their territorial integrity and national sovereignty.

With regard to the Lockerbie affair, we still await the Security Council's comprehensive and final response to Libya's full compliance with the Council's resolutions. It was the Council's own commitment that such a conclusive step would be taken 90 days after Libya's full compliance. We call for transparency and fairness in the trial itself, at The Hague, to avoid any miscarriage of justice.

The international community must never lose track of the long, drawn-out dialogue on the peace process in the Middle East, particularly in Palestine. We call for good faith and consistency in the negotiations until the brotherly Palestinian people attain statehood with national sovereignty and territorial integrity.

In Western Sahara, the international community owes it to the Sahrawi people to ensure the early holding of a free and fair referendum to allow them the priceless opportunity to determine their destiny.

On the global economic front, the last decade of the twentieth century witnessed tremendous progress in some parts of the world, but it also saw stagnation and setbacks, even in some countries that had previously experienced fast economic growth. Periods of economic and financial crisis lead to retrenchment, wherein concern for people gives way to concern for balancing budgets and payments. Those crises have underscored the importance of understanding and strengthening the social underpinnings of development to ensure that peoples, their cultures and their societies are taken into account in the process of development.

Poverty amid plenty is an affront to our common humanity. At a time when the world has the wherewithal to attack poverty vigorously, spectacular affluence and abject poverty are found side by side. In contrast to its potential as the ultimate provider of new opportunities for growth and development worldwide, globalization has been accompanied by widening income disparities among, as well as within, countries and regions. Its ill effects have disproportionately victimized the most vulnerable and marginalized nations and sections of society. Globalization is redefining the nature and role of States and the governance of international bodies, thereby subordinating democratic political processes to unaccountable economic and financial actors and institutions. Globalization is thus undermining the ability of Governments to serve as guarantors of the social, economic, political and cultural health of our communities.

At the expense of our common goals and objectives for international economic cooperation, we have surrendered to blind market forces in the faint hope that somehow things will, as if by magic, turn out right. The consequences of that impoverishing process are clearly visible in a number of alarming trends, such as the takeover of national assets by transnational corporations in the name of public enterprise

privatization and commercialization. As a result, Africa enters the new century hanging on the vagaries of global markets, accounting for only 1 per cent of global gross domestic product and about 2 per cent of world trade.

Geographically, Africa is probably the world's most fragmented region. The continent is demarcated by about 165 borders dividing it into 53 countries, 22 of them with less than 5 million people and 11 with less than 1 million. That fragmentation imposes real constraints on development, and, without economic integration, Africa will fall farther behind. We therefore call upon the international community to support our efforts at regional integration as we promote regional public assets and initiatives, including regional infrastructure such as roads, railways, ports and power-pooling systems, infectious disease control, centres of excellence for training, regional markets and trade, and agricultural research and early warning systems for drought.

Despite talk of the global village, it is apparent that Africa's lonely days are not yet over. For we still have cause and occasion to feel marginalized in so many respects. We know what it is like to give passage to emergency aircraft and sea vessels that criss-cross our airspace and waterways to attend to emerging crises in distant places while our own crises simmer on and explode in our faces. Our ceasefire agreements and truces are tested beyond limit, while the United Nations stands aloof and unimpressed; yet urgent interventions are deployed to flashpoints in other regions, even without ceasefire guarantees.

Hesitant and half-spirited interventions by the Security Council in several African conflicts have neither done the job nor enhanced the credibility of the United Nations. As the United Nations organ uniquely mandated to maintain international peace and security, the Security Council should make itself equally attentive to the needs of the world's family of nations, including through cooperation with regional arrangements everywhere, as provided for in Chapter VIII of the United Nations Charter. Or is it true that so long as the Security Council remains unreformed, it will always fail to respond adequately to the interests of all the Members of the United Nations?

As we review the progress of nations and design the role of the United Nations in the twenty-first century, we need to remind ourselves that "we the peoples" of the world constitute the real wealth of the brotherhood of nations. The thrust of the United Nations agenda — and, indeed, of development — is therefore to create an enabling environment for people to enjoy long, healthy, peaceful and creative lives.

I wish to put it to this Millennium Assembly that the role of the United Nations in the twenty-first century is to champion the agenda of the world's weak, those marginalized and impoverished by globalization, those currently circumscribed to the margins of policy and decision-making in the international economic and socio-political system. In brief, it is to protect the weak and manage the strong.

The Acting President: I give the floor to Her Excellency The Honourable Janet Bostwick, Attorney General and Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Bahamas.

Ms. Bostwick (Bahamas): The Bahamas delegation sincerely congratulates Mr. Harri Holkeri on his election to the presidency of this Millennium Assembly and assures him and the members of his Bureau of its full cooperation and support.

I wish also to commend Mr. Theo-Ben Gurirab of Namibia, who presided over the fifty-fourth session of the General Assembly.

The Bahamas delegation also wishes to pay special tribute to the Co-Chairpersons of the Millennium Summit, Ms. Tarja Halonen, President of Finland, and Mr. Sam Nujoma, President of the Republic of Namibia. Their combined wisdom and focused leadership contributed in no small part to the success of the Millennium Summit.

The Bahamas is pleased to welcome Tuvalu as the newest Member of this Organization. Tuvalu's membership is a sign of the confidence that the United Nations continues to enjoy among nations of the world as the best hope for the realization of the aspirations of all peoples.

We applaud the Secretary-General's continuing commitment to the United Nations. This was particularly demonstrated by his bold proposals for the reform and revitalization of the Organization, which culminated in the practical, responsive and visionary Millennium Summit Declaration. The Declaration was unanimously adopted by an unprecedented number of heads of State or Government. In this Millennium Declaration, world leaders collectively and succinctly

outlined the labyrinth of issues on the global agenda for which solutions are essential in the twenty-first century. It is now our responsibility to implement it in good faith. It cannot be business as usual in this United Nations.

The Millennium Declaration placed globalization high on the list of issues requiring urgent attention. As a process offering opportunities for growth and development, globalization has never been challenged. It is a grim reality, however, that few have profited, and some, particularly smaller economies, have become marginalized and even more vulnerable.

For many of the small island developing States of the Caribbean, their mainstay industries, particularly bananas and financial services, have come under extreme pressure in this rapidly globalizing world. With respect to financial services, the Bahamas has always cooperated, and will continue to cooperate, with international efforts to combat money laundering. Currently we are amending our legislation and reinforcing our regulatory regime so as to fully comply with international best practices.

While the Bahamas will move expeditiously to correct deficiencies in our financial services industry, we call upon the Financial Action Task Force on Money Laundering (FATF) and the other concerned financial agencies established by developed countries to immediately adopt open and transparent procedures to recognize when such deficiencies have been corrected and to then take the necessary action as a matter of priority.

Additionally, it has been a source of serious concern to us in the Bahamas that one group of countries, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), would seek to unilaterally determine what constitutes "harmful tax competition" in respect to financial services. We urge those countries to cooperate in resolving these issues on the basis of constructive multilateral dialogue, given that the pressures applied in this and other areas not only disrupt growth and development, but could well lead to the reversal of the gains made in the development process.

The intensity of protests in Seattle and in Washington, D.C., have mirrored the frustration of many developing countries in a globalization process which appears to be biased towards the rich and powerful and to widen the gap between haves and have-nots. Yet no country can opt out of globalization. Nor can we ignore the challenge its potentially devastating consequences present for peace and security. The United Nations resolve that globalization must be fully inclusive and equitable should be buttressed with effective action to ensure a vibrant global economic order in which all countries, large and small, developed and developing, mutually benefit.

The Bahamas is now an observer in the World Trade Organization (WTO) and will move purposefully towards full membership. We have chosen to take this course of action because we intend to participate fully in the WTO processes. These processes should, and must, make globalization and trade liberalization inclusive and equitable instruments for development. We made this commitment at the highest level at the Millennium Summit.

There is another commitment in the Millennium Declaration that is of critical importance to small island developing States such as the Bahamas and other members of the Caribbean Community. The Millennium Declaration reaffirms the United Nations resolve to address the special needs of the small island developing States by implementing both the Barbados Programme of Action and the outcome of the twenty-second special session of the General Assembly on this plan. It did so in recognition of the vulnerability of their economies to external shocks and their susceptibility to climate change, sea level rise and natural disasters.

I wish to re-emphasize here that the call in the Barbados plan is for action. In line with the Millennium Declaration and their own national efforts, the small island developing States now expect action, through initiatives such as global disaster management strategies and a vulnerability index. Such initiatives must take fully into account the socio-economic development and survival of small island developing States. For Caribbean Community (CARICOM) small States, we also hope to see the development of an integrated management approach to the Caribbean Sea advanced.

We would also, in this United Nations, urge our partners in the developed world not to continue to put our countries at risk by shipping nuclear and hazardous wastes through the Caribbean Sea. We reiterate this appeal in the face of recent evidence that suggests that

the highly professed safety measures touted by the nuclear-power industry are questionable.

In the Millennium Declaration, world leaders committed themselves to overcoming many seemingly intractable problems for which effective responses can only be of a global nature.

The world's drug problem, and the trafficking in small arms and light weapons, are issues for which the global community urgently needs results. While these twin evils are, in our view, closely linked, every indication is that the trafficking in firearms is taking on a life of its own. The introduction of firearms into ordinary, non-drug related criminal activity, and even domestic conflict, is perhaps the greatest single threat to peace and stability in the Bahamas today.

Therefore, the Bahamas looks forward to next year's United Nations Conference on the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects. We are confident that the commitments made in our Millennium Declaration will motivate us to grasp this significant opportunity for concerted action. We especially urge developed countries in which firearms are manufactured to take the steps necessary to prevent illicit arms trafficking.

In the Millennium Declaration, world leaders committed themselves to the eradication of poverty, hunger and disease, and to making the right to development a reality for all. This commitment compels us to act on several fronts to achieve our objectives. We must, for example, reach agreement to ensure the success of the high-level international and intergovernmental event on financing for development, to be held in the year 2001.

Our commitment means that we must ensure that technological advances benefit not just the few, but all of humankind. We must work more assiduously towards the elimination of human rights violations, including violence against women and the trafficking in women and children. We must ensure equal rights for men and women, to bring down barriers to development. For countries such as the Bahamas, forced to bear the brunt of sustained illegal migration, the United Nations must collectively address not only the challenges of migration flows worldwide, but also the reprehensible practice of alien-smuggling.

Our commitment means that we must achieve a comprehensive reform of the Security Council.

Addressing the unfolding human tragedy of HIV/AIDS is also an important front on which the Millennium Declaration charges us to work. The pernicious effect of this disease, particularly on the economically productive sectors of society, has had a devastating impact on families, communities and nations globally. However, the major burden that AIDS presents, particularly for health care systems, has been most profoundly felt in developing countries, where it threatens to limit and reverse development efforts. Adequate resources must be provided to confront HIV/AIDS, particularly in Africa. In this regard, the pharmaceutical industry must be encouraged to play its necessary role.

The Bahamas welcomed the recently convened conference in Barbados under the auspices of the World Bank, UNAIDS, the Pan American Health Organization/World Health Organization (PAHO/WHO), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), CARICOM and the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), which brought together high-level Caribbean health, education, economic development and labour policy-makers. The Bahamas is committed to doing its part in addressing this serious problem and has offered to host a regional centre to assist in combating this HIV/AIDS pandemic.

The agenda set for the United Nations by world leaders is a formidable one. Forgive me if I restate the obvious — the Secretary-General cannot carry out the crucial mandates we ourselves have entrusted to him unless and until he is assured of adequate and predictable resources on a timely basis. At the same time, the quotas on the basis of which the Organization receives its resources must be assessed in a fair, transparent and equitable manner. Only in this way will we be able to give renewed impetus to the vibrant process of administrative and budgetary reform currently under way. By so doing, we will also break the cycle of the Organization's inability to implement the mandates that we ourselves have collectively set.

Furthermore, we must arrest the process whereby many issues, including some of critical concern to developing countries, have been moved out of the ambit of this universal Organization into narrower, special interest organizations. These organizations harmonize and seek the interest of their Member States. Therefore, the decisions they take can run counter, not only to the interest of non-Member States, but also to that of global society as a whole.

Allow me to raise one more serious concern - the safety and security of our international civil service, the dedicated men and women who are the embodiment of the United Nations global outreach. In this respect, we extend our profound condolences to the families of the staff members who lost their lives as a result of the recent attack on the United Nations office in West Timor. We also join other delegations in condemning this attack and in urging the Government of Indonesia to spare no effort in bringing those responsible to justice. We also extend condolences to the family of the United Nations refugee worker killed in an attack in Guinea. In situations such as these, we must show that we can meet the concerns of our peoples and our world.

Through the historic Millennium Declaration, heads of State and Government reaffirmed their faith in the United Nations and its Charter as indispensable foundations for a more peaceful, prosperous and just world. They also emphasized that the United Nations is the pre-eminent global organization and has a central role in setting and acting upon the global agenda. Heads of State and Government equally provided us with a concise, focused and realistic blueprint for action by the United Nations in the twenty-first century. They have charged the Secretary-General to keep a score-card, the results of which will determine whether we have been true and honourable custodians of the United Nations Charter. It is imperative for us to demonstrate individually, and through our collective efforts, that we can leave for succeeding generations the kind of world envisioned in our Charter.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Enrique Candioti, Secretary of State and Vice-Minister for Foreign Affairs of Argentina.

Mr. Candioti (Argentina) (*spoke in Spanish*): In this, my first statement, allow me to congratulate Mr. Holkeri on his election to the presidency of the General Assembly. I believe that this is a timely opportunity to emphasize the great friendship that unites the Argentine Republic and Finland.

I also express my gratitude to Mr. Theo-Ben Gurirab of Namibia, another country that is a friend to Argentina, for the constructive way in which he presided over the Assembly's work at the last session.

We also offer a cordial welcome to Tuvalu upon its entry into the United Nations and extend our friendship and cooperation to its people.

This debate is taking place after a very productive exchange of opinions at the highest level during the Millennium Summit, which we hope will mark, together with the final Declaration, the beginning of a new era leading to a more equitable world and a more effective Organization, in accordance with objectives set out by the Secretary-General in his report entitled "We the peoples". For my country, this is also an opportunity to set out before the General Assembly the principles and objectives of our foreign policy.

The Government of President Fernando de la Rúa, who took office on 10 December 1999, has drafted a foreign policy on the basis of the mandate it received from the Argentine people. This policy aims at strengthening our integration with neighbouring countries, intensifying the hemispheric dialogue and promoting economic development, social progress, free trade and a ban on weapons of mass destruction.

Argentina is determined to participate on the international scene jointly to build a peaceful and stable world based on the values of representative democracy, the rule of law, the protection and promotion of human rights, respect for the environment, economic liberalization, social progress, international cooperation and the maintenance of international peace and security, pursuant to the purposes and principles of the Charter. Today, as was stated at the Millennium Summit, these aspirations are shared by the vast majority of Members of this Organization.

On the basis of its ongoing interests, the Government has set as a priority objective its political and economic integration with the other States members of the Southern Common Market (MERCOSUR) — Brazil, Paraguay and Uruguay — and associate members Chile and Bolivia. We have agreed with these countries to consolidate MERCOSUR by adopting the measures necessary to promote greater integration on the basis of balance and equity. We have made significant progress towards the expansion of our markets since the signing of the Treaty of Asunción in 1991. This was the fruit of the determination of the member countries to implement an open trade policy in their economic programmes.

The creation of MERCOSUR was a political decision transcending the economic sphere. MERCOSUR provides a political forum within which trust, cooperation and the pursuit of full integration in all areas foster the increasing complementarity and convergence of our interests. Bolivia and Chile have bound themselves to MERCOSUR as associate members in the context of the Free Trade Area and we trust that they will become full members in the near future.

As a consequence of the broadening political and economic dimensions of our integration project, we are also witnessing the convergence of approaches to defence and security in our region. This contributes to a continental perspective based on confidence and cooperation. We and our neighbours have made progress towards the creation of the joint MERCOSUR, Bolivian and Chilean zone of peace. Argentina is part of a nuclear-free Latin America reflecting the peaceful and cooperative security necessary to harmonious development.

At the same time, as a member of the Rio Group, which has now grown to include Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua, Argentina has pursued its high-level political consultations and cooperation in order to maintain peace, strengthen representative democracy and promote sustainable development in the region. It is our firm intention that our countries shall enjoy greater participation in the global economy. At the recent summit convened in Brasilia to commemorate the 500th anniversary of the discovery of Brazil, the Presidents of all the South American countries reaffirmed the spirit of understanding and harmony that marks its relations on the basis of these principles and objectives.

The consolidation of democratic stability in Latin America continues to be a central policy of the Argentine Government. We do not interfere in the domestic affairs of others and we respect international law. We promote the consolidation of democratic processes on the basis of our deep conviction that free, regular and transparent elections and a plurality of political parties are essential instruments for affirming and guaranteeing the institutional nature of democracy.

My country also reaffirms its commitment to eradicating poverty, inequity and social exclusion and to ensuring equal opportunity throughout the region. We shall continue to pursue our joint action in the regional and global campaign against drug trafficking, terrorism, corruption, the illegal trade in arms and organized crime.

The Argentine Republic has a natural interest in the South Atlantic that is reflected in our participation in the zone of peace and cooperation of the South Atlantic, comprised of 21 African and three Latin American countries. At the fifth ministerial meeting held in Buenos Aires in October 1998, a plan of action was adopted to implement our shared objectives in the peaceful settlement of disputes, economic cooperation, development, the conservation of fishery resources, the fight against drug trafficking and the protection of the environment.

My country is in favour of free trade in order to achieve development and the eradication of poverty. The Argentine Government believes that protectionism not only generates the deflection of trade and the closure of markets, but also constitutes a form of discrimination. Argentina urges the entire international community to commit itself seriously to eliminating distortions of trade and will continue to fight for these objectives. In this regard, we believe that progress is being made in negotiations on the free trade agreement of the Americas to create a hemispheric free trade area by the year 2005.

In the World Trade Organization, our country has provided new impetus to the efforts to launch a new round to broaden trade liberalization, particularly in agriculture.

Argentina also continues to support negotiations to develop political and economic association between MERCOSUR and the European Union, including, in this framework, the gradual liberalization of agricultural trade and services.

We are constantly seeking new ways to integrate ourselves with the world. The realities of technological change and continual innovation require developing countries to adapt to a scheme of international economic integration based on a new paradigm of production. The challenge is to ensure the access of the least developed countries to this process of constant technological change and innovation. There can be no doubt that the international community — in particular the United Nations — must cooperate to promote the transfer of technology from developed to developing countries with sufficient flexibility and breadth so that

technological innovations reach those countries with fewer resources.

In his report "We the peoples", the Secretary-General quite rightly attaches great importance to this task. Without the adequate dissemination of and access to the new technologies of the digital revolution, we will see the gap between rich and poor widen. Individual States and the international community as a whole must therefore find solutions that guarantee greater fairness in the use of digital information.

Argentina remains fully committed to the international community's efforts to protect the environment from the negative impact of human activities. In this regard we reaffirm our commitment to the principles of sustainable development agreed upon in 1992 at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development — principles that were reflected in the Rio Declaration on the environment and in Agenda 21. Equally, we would like to stress the importance of making adequate preparation — during this very fifty-fifth General Assembly — for the conference to be held in 2002 to review the implementation of Agenda 21.

Moreover, we feel it is necessary to consolidate the international legal regimes in the field of environmental protection. In this context, and bearing in mind the devastating consequences of atmospheric warming on the global ecosystem and on human life, we attach special importance to the entry into force, as soon as possible, of the Kyoto Protocol to the Framework Convention on Climate Change.

The twenty-first century was preceded by a prolonged strategic and ideological confrontation, which has given way to a moment in history in which representative democracy, human rights and open economies are shared values. At the same time, we are facing a more complex world that has yet to engender a stable international order. The explosion of serious intra-State conflicts — as we have seen in the Balkans or in Africa — are signs of the emergence of a new stage in conflicts — a stage in which, regrettably, conflicts are based on ethnic, cultural and religious differences.

The Republic of Argentina aspires to contribute to achieving multilateral consensus aimed at reducing and neutralizing risks to peace and at facilitating the development of nations. We believe that if this consensus were based on greater democratization in international relations this would increase the efficacy and the functioning of the international system.

Since it is impossible for individual States to face these threats alone, it is necessary to adopt cooperative security policies to eliminate the potential risk of conflicts and to strengthen the stability and security of legal regimes. It is essential that we face in a united fashion the immediate and underlying causes of conflicts, which often arise because of the lack of economic opportunities and because of social inequalities.

The Members of the United Nations face the challenge of finding a response to questions raised by recent international crises, including the international humanitarian crises. My country believes that the principle of non-intervention must be duly respected because it is the pillar underpinning relations between independent States. At the same time, we cannot conceal our concern at the explosion of violence against ethnic, racial or religious minorities.

In particular we are concerned about the situation of vulnerable groups, such as refugees and internally displaced persons, and about the situation of children in armed conflicts. Consequently we believe that the international community cannot remain indifferent and must provide an adequate response to humanitarian crises.

We must emphasize the role that can be played by international tribunals to create awareness that impunity will not be tolerated. The International Criminal Court and the tribunals for Rwanda, the former Yugoslavia and Sierra Leone, which have been created, constitute important instruments of deterrence.

In addition to the internal reforms that the Secretary-General has initiated with singular success within his sphere of competence, the United Nations must give priority to more democratic consensus-building in the decision-making processes of the main and subsidiary organs of the system. This needs to be done in a fashion that does not hamper the speed and effectively with which solutions are found to the daily problems facing the Organization.

Maintenance of international peace and security is a primary responsibility of the Security Council, which must be strengthened. If these responsibilities are not fully shouldered, no other activity of the United

Nations can be carried out with any certainty of success.

Since the inception of multilateral diplomacy, Argentina has defended the principle of the sovereign equality of States. It is therefore not surprising that our country maintains that the reform of the Security Council must be arrived at via consensus, and this consensus must not entail new discrimination, privileges or exclusions.

The vast majority of the international community — seeking to ensure respect for the values of democracy and universality — believes that a new Security Council will have to allow for greater participation by all. This cannot be achieved if new permanent seats — like those established in 1945 — are established. Reform of the Council must allow all States a greater opportunity to participate in the Council, which must not be monopolized by only a few countries. For this reason, Argentina supports exclusively an increase in the number of non-permanent members and the introduction of restrictions on the right of the veto, without losing sight of the ultimate objective of eliminating it altogether. We support the adoption of rules of procedure that guarantee transparency and the possibility of the participation of all Member States in this organ.

Our support for the peaceful settlement of disputes continues to be a fundamental feature of our foreign policy. President de la Rúa reiterated the Argentine commitment to continue participating in peacekeeping operations established by the Security Council. The most recent conflicts have shown how important efficient training of the forces participating in these missions is. Experience acquired by Argentina in 42 years of participating in these missions is reflected in the creation of the joint Argentine centre for training for peacekeeping operations. It has been operating since 1995, with the participation of personnel from other Member States. We also established the centre for training of security forces for foreign missions. Argentina, which is currently involved in nine peacekeeping operations, places at the disposal of the United Nations its military and police training centres. We also support the initiatives to strengthen the rapid deployment capacity of the Organization, and we would support restructuring efforts aimed at optimizing the planning and support for peacekeeping operations both at Headquarters and in the field.

My country was pleased to receive the conclusions and recommendations recently issued by the Panel on United Nations Peace Operations and contained in the Brahimi report. These provide a valuable basis for building international consensus aimed at strengthening the capacity of the Organization to prevent conflicts and to maintain and re-establish peace. Argentina, which is part of the Bureau of the Special Committee for Peacekeeping Operations, supports the conducting, as soon as possible, of a detailed analysis of the recommendations contained in the Brahimi report — including its possible financial implications — with a view to achieving its early implementation.

My Government is particularly concerned about the problems related to the security and protection of those who participate in peacekeeping operations and humanitarian missions. The personnel of the United Nations and associated personnel, as well as the personnel of other agencies that provide humanitarian assistance, are facing increasingly risks situations, as we have seen recently in the tragic events that have occurred around the world. Consequently, Argentina, which is a party to the 1994 Convention on the Safety of United Nations and Associated Personnel, has urged an improvement in the security situation of United Nations personnel via the adoption of practical and legal measures, including financial-planning and implementation measures for these operations.

In this context we should also reiterate the duty of the international community to provide assistance to those countries facing emergency situations, which arise as a result either of natural disasters or of armed conflicts. In this area a significant role can be played by the "White Helmets" initiative, which involves the establishment of bodies of specialized volunteers organized by the Members of the United Nations to provide humanitarian assistance to peoples who are victims of extreme emergencies and also to mitigate the serious problems that affect these people.

We should also mention the issue of AIDS which particularly affects the poorest areas of the world. More than 34 million people suffer from this illness today. The virus has spread dramatically. In particular, more than two thirds of the victims are in sub-Saharan Africa. This pandemic is aggravating poverty. The illness and death of so many workers is draining already weakened economies. The impact of this phenomenon on the future of the affected regions will

probably mean greater marginalization and will undermine the foundations of stability, security and peace. The international community and this Organization and its specialized agencies must contribute urgently all available resources to the fight against this disease.

I would like to refer in particular to the sovereignty dispute between my country and the United Kingdom regarding the Malvinas, South Georgia and South Sandwich Islands as well as the surrounding seas.

The recovery of the full exercise of sovereignty over this part of our national territory, respecting the interests of the inhabitants and international law, is a precept enshrined in the Constitution of Argentina. This item is on the agenda of the Organization, which in numerous resolutions has requested the Governments of Argentina and the United Kingdom to renew negotiations to find a just and definitive solution to the sovereignty controversy, thus putting an end to a colonial situation imposed by force in 1833.

Today, in accordance with that request, Argentina reiterates once again its complete willingness to renew bilateral negotiations with the United Kingdom to resolve this question. We reiterate our support for the mission of good offices with which the General Assembly charged the Secretary-General to assist the parties in achieving this objective.

The world stage in the post-cold-war era is the scene of ethnic conflicts, civil wars, massive violations of human rights and fundamental freedoms, illegal traffic in arms and other threats. At the same, time we are seeing the unprecedented spread of representative democracy and economic and technological modernization.

Against this backdrop, our main task is to reach agreements that will enable us to face these challenges and seize these opportunities in the best way possible.

Equipping the United Nations for the challenges of the new millennium is the great task awaiting us. All Member States must undertake to fulfil this commitment if our efforts are to be crowned with success. Argentina is committed to this task and will continue making its contribution.

On 31 December next, my country will end its term as a member of the Security Council. During its two-year term, Argentina has done its utmost to contribute constructively to decision-making and consensus-building on all items on the Council's agenda.

On the basis of our potential and bearing in mind the features of the current international situation, Argentina intends, in the twenty-first century, to continue to play an active part in the consolidation of peace and international security and in the development of peoples.

The Acting President: I now call on His Excellency The Honourable Allan Cruickshank, Minister for Foreign Affairs, Tourism and Information of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines.

Mr. Cruickshank (Saint Vincent and the Grenadines): I take this opportunity to congratulate the President of the General Assembly on his election. I am confident that his vision and energy will guide this session to a successful conclusion.

I also thank Mr. Theo-Ben Gurirab, who led the fifty-fourth session of the General Assembly with distinction and efficiency.

I commend Mr. Kofi Annan, the esteemed Secretary-General of this Organization, for the thoughtful recommendations which he has put forward in his report to the Millennium Summit entitled "We the peoples: the role of the United Nations in the twenty-first century". His vision and stewardship have proved to be vital factors in advancing the work and mission of the United Nations at this critical time in the history of the Organization and the world.

I join the previous speakers in welcoming the nation of Tuvalu as the 189th and newest Member of the United Nations family. Our newest entrant is also the smallest Member country of the Organization, with a population of 10,000 and a land area of nine square miles. It was very pleasing to my delegation to see the leader of that nation proudly take his place among the other leaders of the world in what was the largest gathering of heads of State or Government ever assembled in one place, the Millennium Summit. There is a special affinity between the countries of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) and Tuvalu. We are among the smallest constituents of the Organization. We share similar historical and constitutional experiences. We face the same environmental threats. We look forward, with confidence, to a future involving the creative

utilization of the phenomenal developments in the area of information technology.

My country's Prime Minister, The Right Honourable Sir James F. Mitchell, joined other leaders from the Caribbean Community, of which he is the current Chairman, in denouncing the growing insensitivity towards and disregard for the interests of small developing countries on the part of the powerful in today's world. In his address to the Millennium Summit the Prime Minister noted that while our religious heritage has taught us how to reach across the boundaries of nations through the very inspirational guideline, "love your neighbour as yourself", small and vulnerable island States such as our own are being victimized by the application of international rules crafted by the mighty to serve their own purposes, oblivious to the concerns, and consequences for the well-being, of others. We are all affected by the modalities of the global village which we inhabit, through revolutionary developments in communication technology. Indeed, we have all become neighbours, and yet the competition among the world's peoples has become fiercer, with the rich countries surging ahead and widening the gap with poor countries. This gap is now related not only to material wealth, but also, frighteningly, to the ability of less developed countries to compete in the accepted medium of communication, because of the existence of an ever-widening digital divide.

The Millennium Summit concluded with the adoption by world leaders of a Declaration affirming the importance of the United Nations and the need to strengthen its peacekeeping operations, as well as making commitments to targeted reductions in poverty, the levels of inhuman living conditions experienced by impoverished nations around the world, the incidence and spread of HIV/AIDS and the provision of basic education for all children. On the other hand, we are aware that the current world order is rapidly falling out of step with today's realities and that there is a pressing need for the international community to come together and address the numerous challenges before us.

We must acknowledge that efforts to address old issues, like world poverty and its distribution, as well as new ones arising from globalization, the rapid growth of information technology and the resulting digital divide, the consequences of the environmental degradation of our planet, HIV/AIDS and gender issues, among others, have largely been inadequate. Our common and daunting task is therefore to ensure that this globalized world will be beneficial for all and not just for some. More than ever before, there is an urgent need to foster a consciousness of universal moral values in order to deal with present-day problems, all of which are assuming an increasingly global dimension. The promotion of peace and human rights, the settling of armed conflicts, both within and among States, the protection of immigrants, the safeguarding of the environment, the battle against terrible diseases, the fight against drug and arms trafficking, money laundering and economic and political corruption are issues which no nation, regardless of how wealthy or powerful, can successfully address alone. They concern the entire human community and must be addressed and resolved through common universal efforts.

My country, a small State in the Caribbean, has always been aware of its interdependence with other countries for its prosperity and security. We have moved to advance our interests through multilateral cooperation in the Organization of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS), CARICOM, the Organization of American States (OAS), the Association of Caribbean States (ACS), the Commonwealth and the institutions of the United Nations system. For a small developing country like Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, multilateralism is not an option; it is an integral part of our policies and programmes to enhance our standard of living and create a better life for all of our people. I therefore reiterate my country's commitment to and support for the work of the United Nations and its agencies in this regard.

The Millennium Summit provided an appropriate opportunity for the assembled leaders to rededicate themselves to the attempt to have an impact on and change for the better the quality of life of the world's poorest people, who are trapped in a vicious cycle of deprivation and suffering. The Summit will have proved worthwhile if it is remembered not as a high-profile event to make the transition to a new millennium, but as an event that made the transition from words to deeds. The times demand nothing less.

The security, welfare and development of people must, in the context of any new world order, dominate the attention of the world's multilateral financial institutions, as well as of the United Nations. We must undertake sustained and concerted efforts to free our people from poverty, hunger, illiteracy and disease.

While micro-credit and other poverty-alleviation programmes have been successful, much needs to be done to eradicate poverty. In this era of plenty, millions still suffer from hunger.

We had curbed old diseases like malaria, cholera and tuberculosis, but they have reappeared in new and drug-resistant forms. Deadly diseases like HIV/AIDS are spreading at an alarming pace. The leaders of the Caribbean Community have placed combating this pandemic at the top of the regional agenda. This scourge has already claimed the lives of over 10 million people. It is projected to claim the lives of over 200 million by the year 2010, the majority of them in sub-Saharan Africa.

The developed world is not spared, either. Worldwide figures indicate that 34 million people are living with the disease, over 18 million have died since the beginning of the epidemic and over 13 million children have become orphaned. In the Caribbean region, the disease now threatens the human resource development efforts of CARICOM and could reverse the social and economic gains of the countries in that subregion. The prevalence rate in the wider Caribbean is estimated at 172 cases per 100,000 people, the highest rate of prevalence in the Americas, and second, in terms of the growth rate, to sub-Saharan Africa. A United Nations AIDS survey in 1999 showed that over 360,000 adults and children in our region were living with the disease. There is no immunity. International cooperation in the medical, ethical and legal fields must be intensified if the disease is to be contained.

We cannot preach about human rights and the universality of the United Nations while at the same time ignoring the aspirations of over 23 million people in the Republic of China on Taiwan. It is the view of the Saint Vincent and the Grenadines delegation that the time has come when serious consideration should be given to the eligibility of the Republic of China on Taiwan to become a Member of the United Nations. In this regard, my Government is urging that the subject be placed on the agenda of the fifty-sixth session of the General Assembly. We urge every Member State of this noble Organization to give its full support to this worthy initiative for a country whose democratic credentials cannot be challenged.

Saint Vincent and the Grenadines welcomes the progress made in the Middle East peace process thus far, and expresses the hope that through dialogue, compromise and goodwill, the dream of lasting peace may become a reality.

If countries like Saint Vincent and the Grenadines are to survive globalization, the international community must give careful and urgent consideration to the following measures: the revitalization of growth in developed countries; the lowering of interest rates; access to the world's markets for the products of developing countries; the reduction of debt and the debt-service burden; the reversal of the deteriorating situation in the marketing arrangements for primary products produced in the developing countries; economic diversification; increasing the levels of official development assistance and humanitarian aid; reductions in net capital flows from bilateral and multilateral sources; and combating the negative consequences of the graduation of some countries like ours, by international financial institutions, from concessionary funding arrangements.

Saint Vincent and the Grenadines shares the concerns of other developing countries with regard to the general decline in official development assistance and the flow of foreign direct investment to developing countries. We look forward to the consultation on financing for development planned for 2001.

The changing world environment dictates the need for the revitalization and restructuring of the various organs of the United Nations organizations, but my Government attaches very high priority to the revitalization and strengthening of the role of the United Nations in promoting international cooperation for sound development, including economic development. We share the view that the United Nations should be encouraged to develop its full potential in the area of international economic cooperation and should be endowed with the requisite resources to contribute to solving the serious economic and social problems facing developing countries in their efforts to achieve sustained economic growth and development.

We commend those donor countries that have made financial contributions to the South Pacific Applied Geoscience Commission to assist the development of an environmental vulnerability index, and call for the early adoption by the international community of a vulnerability index that would serve as a guide for multilateral financial institutions and the

United Nations on the specific vulnerabilities of developing countries.

Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, like other small island developing States in the strategically located Caribbean, continues to be plagued by the endemic problems of the production, trafficking and consumption of illicit drugs and psychotropic substances. This modern day scourge continues to pose serious problems which threaten to destroy the social and moral fabric of our communities. My Government is fully committed to the ongoing process of cooperation with other countries to counter these illegal activities. In this regard, I wish to reiterate in this forum our complete support for the Multilateral Evaluation Mechanism (MEM), developed by the member countries of the Organization of American States (OAS) to monitor countries' cooperation in the international fight against the drug trade. I also take this opportunity to urge that more resources be allocated through collaborative efforts by the international community to encourage farmers to keep away from the production of illicit crops.

In his address to the Millennium Summit, the Chairman of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) spoke of the outstanding and invaluable record of good governance and respect for human rights and democracy in the entire Caribbean region. These are aspects of our society of which we are eternally proud.

Recently in Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, our constitutional democracy was put to the test through open expressions of dissent, but withstood the ordeal through dialogue and compromise. My Government is pleased to put on record its appreciation to the Vincentian people for upholding democratic values and respecting the supremacy of the constitution and the rule of law as fundamental principles by which our beloved country exists and governs itself. I also wish to express gratitude to CARICOM, to the Organization of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS), to the churches, to the National Youth Council, to the Chamber of Industry and Commerce, to the Employers' Federation and to many individuals and other institutions for their invaluable contributions in bringing about a swift resolution of the matter. My Government has long recognized the urgent need for constitutional reform and will continue to work with other interested parties to bring about meaningful change that would seek, among other things, to strengthen the foundations of our democracy. As full members of this body, we have seen, at close quarters, the importance of constitutional reform in the promotion of democracy, stability and economic development.

We also recognize that constitutional reform is crucial to strengthening our own integration processes within the Caribbean Community, including the establishment of a Caribbean court of justice, to be, inter alia, the authoritative body adjudicating on matters pertaining to the interpretation and implementation of the provisions of the Treaty of Chaguaramas, which established CARICOM.

Many matters of profound importance to Saint Vincent and the Grenadines and the Caribbean Community as a whole are included in the agenda of this fifty-fifth session of the General Assembly. These include: sustainable development, the future of United Nations reform, the International Criminal Court and human rights, the death penalty and financing for development.

I wish, once again, to focus the attention of this noble gathering to the issue of the Caribbean banana trade with the European Union (EU). The facts are well documented. Banana exports to the European Union from my country and similarly from Dominica, Saint Lucia and other African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) countries are crucial to the economies of these countries and represent over half of all export earnings in some cases. The industry provides substantial employment for many families in Dominica, Saint Lucia and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, my own country.

Saint Vincent and the Grenadines is appreciative of the efforts of the European Commission and other parties which seek to bring about an amicable and equitable solution to the dispute. However we are deeply concerned that, should the tariff quota regime be eliminated as a means of ensuring conformity with the 1999 World Trade Organization (WTO) ruling, this would have immeasurable harmful consequences for our economy. It will lead to the destruction of the Caribbean banana industry and negatively affect other ACP supplying States where exports are also crucial to the economy.

The two alternative solutions being proposed by the European Commission, that is a first come, first served system, along with a tariff rate quota and, if that proves impracticable, moving directly to a tariff only system, would prove to be disadvantageous and

disastrous for the Caribbean industry. Neither system ensures access.

We therefore urge the interested parties to the dispute to use their substantial influence to bring about the much-needed breakthrough which will facilitate a resolution that is acceptable to all parties. An efficacious settlement of this long-standing issue will support our efforts, as a small economically vulnerable island State, in eradicating poverty and maintaining peace and economic security, which are vital for the achievement of economic diversification within a reasonable period of transition.

While we recognize that there are structural and inherent disadvantages that inhibit our ability to compete with highly integrated operations on the market, we ask that an equitable solution be sought in order to allow our people to engage meaningfully in trade and development, rather than be forever subjected to the aid and dependency syndrome. Our expressed desire to hold on to our banana industry, which served us well, in no way reflects any misunderstanding of the realities of the present day trade and economic environment.

My delegation also wishes to express its concern over the procedural obstacles raised in Geneva within the WTO that would prevent consideration of the waiver requested in respect of the new ACP-EU Partnership Agreement if it includes bananas without advice on how the regime will be formed. My country and other members of the Caribbean Community have been actively engaged in diversifying our economies throughout the last quarter of the last century. This has involved activities in the agricultural, manufacturing, tourism and service sectors. In Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, as a direct corollary of this thrust, we have improved air access to our country and my Government continues to prioritize the education of our people to prepare them for the opportunities that will accrue.

My Government will continue to honour its commitments to all international agreements to which it is signatory. In furtherance to our international obligation we have signed the following: the United Nations Convention on Contracts for the International Sale of Goods, the Convention on the Recognition and Enforcement of Foreign Arbitral Awards, the United Nations Convention on the Carriage of Goods by Sea, the International Convention Against the Taking of Hostages and the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of Crimes against Internationally Protected Persons, including Diplomatic Agents. All of these instruments were deposited with the Secretary General during the Millennium Summit.

During his speech at the Millennium Summit, Prime Minister Mitchell stated that:

> "Small island States such as our own, with an enviable record of good governance and human rights, have seen the mighty in the banana trade using the international rules — crafted by them — impede our economic growth."

Similarly, the verdicts that have been imposed by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) on our financial services, without any deference to our rights to be heard, demonstrate total disregard for the well-being of small vulnerable States attempting to diversify their economies. I echo Prime Minister Mitchell's sentiment, "Where is the fairness in free trade?"

Offshore financial services is one of our chosen avenues of economic diversification. We believe that we are capable of offering a useful, professional and mutually beneficial service to our clients. Accordingly, in 1995 we embarked on a comprehensive legislative exercise to ensure that we would put in place a regulatory and supervisory framework to adequately administer the conduct of international financial businesses operating in Saint Vincent and the Grenadines. In our efforts to further strengthen our regulatory regime against money laundering activities, we enacted six additional pieces of offshore legislation. Saint Vincent and the Grenadines is committed to being a responsible member of the international community, including by playing its part in the war against money laundering. We believe that those who toil to build a better life for themselves, their children, their grandchildren and any other beneficiaries, should be afforded the right of privacy in their affairs. Such people should have access to facilities that will preserve that privacy, and the opportunity should be created for them to optimize and maximize their wealth. It is, however, important to note that whilst we believe in the preservation of privacy, we are also resolute in efforts to ensure that persons of undesirable character and conduct are not allowed to take advantage of the opportunities that are available in our international finance sector.

My country and others in the Caribbean Community are deeply concerned that the so-called harmful tax initiative of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) is designed to frustrate tax competition, and that it threatens the sovereignty of small island States desperately seeking creative avenues for survival. Such action on the part of the OECD could encourage the creation of a tax cartel, thereby removing the possibility of lower taxes from those who wish to legitimately escape them through the exercise of free choice. It would also close off an area of diversification and economic activity in which poor developing countries can be competitive and which they have actively promoted for a long time. The unilateral practices of the OECD, the Financial Stability Forum and the Financial Action Task Force also impact negatively on the burden of taxation in wealthy countries, impair the competitive capacity of Caribbean jurisprudence in the provision of a global financial service and stifle economic growth in the 47 blacklisted countries, with all the concomitant evils.

The small island States of the Caribbean are among those countries most at risk from the adverse effects of climate change. Already, many of our islands are experiencing those effects in areas that impact directly on the important tourism sector of our economies. We are also prone to extremely damaging natural disasters, especially hurricanes and storm surges, which visit us annually with increasing frequency and ferocity. Our diverse region also experiences droughts and floods, volcanic eruptions and earthquakes, with equally devastating effects, if less regularly than the pleasantly named perennials. The continued committed support of the international community is crucial in complementing the work of those States in addressing these serious problems.

Our survival as a region is intimately interwoven with our environment. Our physical and economic limitations should not be further burdened by the transshipment of hazardous waste through our waterways. Such actions are a flagrant violation of our human rights and an affront to our sovereign dignity. We therefore reiterate the call for the Caribbean Sea to be a nuclear-free zone in the context of sustainable development.

In closing, I take this opportunity to pay tribute in this forum to one who has upheld the highest ideals of the Charter of the United Nations, through service to our country, to the Caribbean and to the international community. I speak of the Prime Minister of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines and current Chairman of the Caribbean Community, The Right Honourable Sir James F. Mitchell. For 34 years he has served as an elected member of our legislature. He has seen our country through the stages of constitutional development from crown colony to internal self-government, and finally, as our longest serving Prime Minister, to a fully independent State. For us in Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, it is difficult to contemplate public life without him. His address at the Millennium Summit was his last to this body, for he has decided to demit office as Prime Minister before the twenty-first anniversary of our political independence, on 27 October 2000. Sir James Mitchell has made us all proud by his long, dedicated and visionary service. The initiatives taken by him in the area of land reform, which empowered people through land ownership, are exemplary. I think it is appropriate that, on behalf of Vincentians everywhere, I extend sincere gratitude to him from this rostrum.

The challenge is ours: to turn our words into action and to agree on a common vision of our future.

The Acting President: I give the floor to the Chairman of the delegation of Niger, His Excellency Mr. Ousmane Moutari.

Mr. Moutari (Niger) (*spoke in French*): I wish at the very outset to convey to the countries and institutions represented here a message of sincere friendship from the people of Niger along with its fervent wish to maintain and continue to strengthen the links of peaceful coexistence and of fruitful and mutually beneficial cooperation with all the other peoples of the world.

My warm welcome and hearty congratulations go to Tuvalu, the latest country to join the United Nations family.

With the 24 November 1999 presidential elections and the 31 December 1999 legislative elections, our people emerged from a period of political instability and economic decline with every confidence in the resiliency of the democratic institutions established by our 18 July 1999 constitution, and with strengthened determination to ensure that the universal ideals of peace, freedom, justice and equity will prevail in Niger, throughout Africa, and everywhere in the world.

We are participating in this great gathering at the beginning of the twenty-first century, proud of being among the democratic nations and committed, at home and internationally, to the establishment of institutional and legal provisions based on free and equal participation by all, on transparency, on responsibility and on solidarity.

Today's Niger is experiencing the same freeing of creative forces that results from the triumph of freedom, and the same upsurge in individual and collective initiative that is today being generated in democratic societies everywhere. We are no less optimistic about the inevitable triumph of the universal values of which the General Assembly is the shrine. But we also feel the same wrenching pain over the uncertain future caused by the persistence of conflicts and the destitution of the vast majority who are crushed beneath the burden of debt, endemic diseases, illiteracy and, above all, the troubling inadequacies of the remedies prescribed to deal effectively with the ills afflicting humankind.

Hence our even more profound attachment to the principles and ideals of the Charter and our full conviction that the United Nations, which is at risk of being out of step with current developments towards increasingly participatory management of our common public resources, will undertake the necessary reforms to make its institutions and organs more responsive to the aspirations of the people they are supposed to represent.

Refashioning the Organization to match the new century that is beginning, to make it a real instrument of change and to renew our hope goes far beyond simply restructuring its main bodies, subsidiary bodies and specialized agencies. We must also strive vigorously to open up the entire system to increasingly active partners, such as Parliaments, governmental regional organizations, non-governmental organizations, organizations of civil society, the media and the private sector, without ever losing sight of the primary vocation of the United Nations as an expression of the national will of Member States. This would greatly increase the international community's capacity for action in such varied areas as peace and international security, the fight against pandemics, especially HIV/AIDS, poverty eradication, the resolution of the question of debt and, generally speaking, the promotion of sustainable development in the world.

For many countries represented here the primary ongoing source of anguish comes from the absence of basic physical security for citizens who are victims of armed conflict, and the unacceptable proliferation of light weapons and small arms, which States that are unstable and economically drained have difficulty halting. Other forums, including the Organization of African Unity, have pointed out ways of resolving the conflicts in Sierra Leone, Angola and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, in close cooperation with the United Nations.

With regard to the Middle East, the recent failure of the Camp David process should further strengthen our determination in the tireless search for a just and lasting peace that can restore the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, including their right to an independent State, and ensure the return of the Golan Heights to Syria. In Western Sahara, it is time that the relevant United Nations resolutions were implemented for the self-determination of the Sahrawi people. In addition, the Iraqi people continue to be victims of an embargo that chiefly affects the most vulnerable sectors of society, including women and children. It is high time that the international community took the necessary measures to alleviate the pain of the Iraqi people.

With regard to small arms and light weapons, which are one of the major challenges facing the international community, my Government feels that concrete and sustained measures should be taken at three levels — national, regional and worldwide — to combat the illicit trade, proliferation and use of this type of weapon. In this regard, my Government is pleased that a United Nations mission recently visited the Niger in order to evaluate in the field the relevance of the request for financing submitted by my Government.

It is a pleasure for me to warmly thank the Governments of all interested States, particularly of France, Germany, Japan and Norway, for their financial contributions to the United Nations fund to assist States in the collection of small arms, which made that mission possible.

A draft submitted by my country forms part of the subregional and regional initiatives aimed at halting the illicit traffic in small arms and light weapons, such as the Moratorium adopted on 30 October 1998 by the Conference of Heads of State and Government of the

Economic Community of West African States and the integrated project on security and development called Programme for Coordination and Assistance for Security and Development.

The handover, on 5 June, of weapons held by various groups of the former rebellion and the lighting on 25 September 2000 of a flame of peace at Agadez, Niger, create hope for a return to calm for the people of the Niger and the full implementation of projects designed with the welcome assistance of bilateral and multilateral partners of the Niger. In this regard, the convening of the United Nations Conference on the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects next year bodes well. For the Niger the goal of that Conference should be to develop and strengthen international, regional and national efforts to prevent, combat, limit and eradicate illicit traffic in small arms and light weapons through strengthening national capacities in the areas of customs, police, justice and information.

Never before has humankind had such wealth and so much potential to create common well-being. Yet today more than half of the world population still lives in destitution, excluded from the benefits of globalization and of the digital revolution. We can certainly welcome the unanimous will expressed by the international community to reduce poverty by half by 2015. But we need to go beyond statements of faith to establish a real international development strategy firmly based on the eradication of absolute poverty and on reviving growth in the developing world, and particularly in Africa, the most vulnerable region.

The treatment of the question of the external debt of poor countries is one of the best barometers by which we can measure the real degree of the international community's commitment in the search for appropriate solutions to eradicate poverty. The Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) Debt Initiative, the present framework for debt alleviation, is too slow and too selective and comes with restrictive eligibility requirements that need to be made more flexible; otherwise, many countries will remain in perpetual poverty. Hence the urgent need to give fresh impetus to this Initiative.

It is also essential to cooperate closely at the international level in order to further strengthen the cohesiveness of the coordination mechanisms of the various initiatives for Africa, so that that continent can benefit more from development assistance.

Moreover, while not a panacea, information and communication technologies are important factors, for the developing world in general and for Africa in particular, of growth and integration into the global economy. The United Nations has a leading role to play in creating a partnership framework that would promote initiatives aimed at closing the digital divide so that technological benefits will not remain a remote promise.

The recent high-level debate of the Economic and Social Council on the role of information technology highlighted in a timely manner the urgent need to make the digital revolution a tool for development and to fairly distribute its benefits through international cooperation. My country also fully supports the recommendation of the high-level expert group, contained in the Secretary-General's report, calling for universal access to new technology to be set out in a General Assembly resolution as a basic human right.

The global partnership against AIDS in Africa, whose vitality was demonstrated during the Durban Conference, must henceforth be based, among other things, on the mobilization of sufficient resources, on prevention and on access to drugs.

In an altogether different area, my delegation believes that particular attention should be given to the insidious problem of malaria. Increasingly resistant to the medical treatment used so far, this illness — which above all affects the most vulnerable populations of women and children — is currently a source of profound concern for Africa. This was confirmed by the recent summit of heads of State held at Abuja, Nigeria, on the issue. That meeting highlighted the importance of preventive action and of increasing the means to combat malaria. There is thus a need for the international community to give this problem the full attention it deserves and to contribute further to mobilizing the necessary resources for the research, prevention, treatment and eradication of that disease.

At the threshold of the new millennium, the time is certainly right to rethink development. As the Secretary-General said at the tenth session of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), held in Bangkok, the time has indeed come for a new global deal for least developed countries. That new global compact will be aimed at

correcting imbalances and at making it possible for everyone to participate in the new world economy and to share equally in its benefits. Today, it is undeniable that globalization has been accompanied by heightened inequalities and that, given the way it has evolved, it will not be able to meet the expectations of poor countries, whose rural and urban populations are paying a heavy social price for that process.

Moreover, the failure of the recent World Trade Organization (WTO) Conference in Seattle has compromised the launching of what was supposed to be the development cycle that was finally to make it possible to attain the benefits of the much-touted trade liberalization. That development, it has been said in passing, is constantly being slowed by the protectionism of industrialized countries.

The United Nations, as the democratic and universal body with the mandate to achieve the objectives of development, must more than ever promote reform and coordination of the international mechanisms of trade and finance. To that end, our common Organization has the necessary moral authority to regulate the process of globalization in the common interest of all. There is therefore a need to strengthen its role and to put in place rules for good global governance that are capable of promoting — in the words of that hallowed phrase — globalization with a human face.

With the holding in 2001 of the international conference on financing for development and the third United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries, we hold out the resolute hope that there will be greater mobilization of financial resources, better coordination of policies and more effective cooperation among development actors, in particular among Governments, the United Nations system, international financial institutions, the private sector and civil society, so as to achieve the major objectives of poverty eradication and development.

The praiseworthy efforts of the United Nations to promote and consolidate new and restored democracies deserves strong support, as that is in keeping with the will of our Organization to meet the aspirations of the peoples of the world.

We in Niger fully appreciate all the valuable assistance given by the United Nations system and friendly countries for the restoration of democracy. After more than a decade of political and institutional instability, Niger — one of the least developed countries of the world, which is bowing under the weight of the debt burden and the impact of the downward trend in official development assistance and of climatic vagaries — has seen a return to democracy, in accordance with the profound aspirations of our people. However, as was so well put in his swearing-in statement by the President of the Republic, Mr. Mamadou Tandja,

> "We are aware that the support of the international community is essential to succeed in this recovery. We therefore appeal to all countries that support peace and solidarity and to international organizations to accompany us in our efforts, on the basis of mutual beneficial interests and with strict respect for national sovereignty."

We would like formally to reiterate here our gratitude to the United Nations Development Programme, the United Nations Population Fund, the United Nations Children's Fund and all of Niger's development partners for the invaluable support they have constantly given my country and its people during their most difficult times.

By chance the schedule has it that Niger is speaking just before the end of the general debate of the fifty-fifth session of the General Assembly, the so-called Millennium Assembly. What, then, could be more natural than for me to conclude my statement by repeating our satisfaction with the outstanding work done by our brother, Mr. Kofi Annan, at the head of the universal Organization? Whether it be in the area of maintaining international peace and security or that of developed countries' providing development assistance to the least developed, the Secretary-General deserves our full trust, support and encouragement.

Namibia's Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mr. Theo-Ben Gurirab, your predecessor, Mr. President, was a good President. His old companion in the struggle, the late Mr. Johnny Makatini, as demanding as he was in his lifetime, would have been as proud as we at seeing the unequalled diplomatic talents Mr. Gurirab displayed for a whole year. I pay humble tribute to him here on behalf of Niger. I say to him:

(*spoke in English*)

Theo, you will always be a freedom fighter.

(*spoke in French*)

As for you, Mr. President, we know that the torch that has been passed to you is in good hands. Your personal competence and Finland's tradition of always standing with the weakest leads us fervently to believe that the Millennium Summit's conclusions will find in you a true and committed advocate, so that at last our Organization can acquire the new habits required by the advent of the twenty-first century.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to the Chairman of the delegation of the Marshall Islands, His Excellency Mr. Jackeo Relang.

Mr. Relang (Marshall Islands): I would like first of all to congratulate the President, on his assumption of the office of President of the fifty-fifth session of the United Nations General Assembly. I wish him every success in this difficult and inspiring task. I would also like to express my sincere appreciation to his predecessor, Mr. Theo-Ben Gurirab, for his exceptional leadership during the fifty-fourth session.

Allow me to include in this tribute the Secretary-General for his efforts and crucial role in maintaining and promoting the role of this Organization, and for his inspiration in strengthening its effectiveness and credibility with respect to peace, security, justice and development in the world.

I wish to add a few comments to the statement made earlier by the representative of the Federated States of Micronesia on behalf of the Pacific Islands Forum countries.

Let us pause for a moment to recognize the contribution of the founding fathers and framers of the United Nations and its Charter. They produced a document which, in large measure, has contributed to an ever-increasing consciousness of the prerequisites necessary for world peace. Today we should celebrate the existence of the United Nations and its accomplishments, both of which offer us the opportunity to reflect on how collectively we can better chart our path and articulate our goals more clearly for the next millennium. President Kessai Note's address to the Millennium Summit reaffirmed the adherence and commitment of the Republic of the Marshall Islands to the principles enshrined in the Charter for the collective good of all people.

I take great pleasure in reiterating the Marshall Islands' warm welcome to the Government and peoples of Tuvalu, as the 189th Member of this Organization. Indeed, the admission of new Member States adds to the legitimacy of the United Nations.

On the other hand, the denial of membership in this Organization to the 23 million people of the Republic of China on Taiwan, who have made a significant and meaningful contribution to international development, is contrary not only to the true spirit of the United Nations Charter, but also to its principle of universality and to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. We must strengthen the vital role of the Organization in achieving the goals of conflict prevention, maintenance of peace, regional stability, promotion of fundamental human rights and development of democracy and international progress, and in fulfilling the aspirations of peoples to self-determination and engagement, because the United Nations is the only Organization that can bring that shining light to those 23 million people. Furthermore, the United Nations is the only forum for Member States to build mutual trust and to resolve issues through peaceful dialogue. The guiding principles of democracy, respect for human rights and the right of peoples to self-determination must, in conformity with the principles of justice and international law, continue to underpin our collective aspirations. This will require our concerted action in this new millennium.

The Republic of the Marshall Islands applauds and commends the unprecedented efforts made by the leaders of the People's Democratic Republic of Korea and the Republic of Korea, who have engaged in a dialogue that may help chart a course towards lasting peace in that peninsula. I wish to state also that the Government of the Republic of the Marshall Islands encourages the leaders of Israel and Palestine to seize the historic opportunity that is within reach to peacefully conclude a framework agreement towards lasting peace in the Middle East. I wish to commend the efforts of the United States of America in this regard.

The immutable law of change makes it necessary for the United Nations to continue to critically examine its performance and structures in search of practical and timely solutions. This it must certainly do, because

the current political landscape is vastly different from the one that prevailed 50 years ago. It is characterized by a more than threefold increase in the number of nations with membership in the United Nations, and by a heightened spirit of generosity and desire on the part of civil society and corporations to become more active players in the process of change. It is imperative, therefore, that those elements and structures which are antiquated, those which have ceased to promote the welfare of nations and those which no longer minister to the needs of a continually changing humanity be swept away and relegated to the pages of history.

A more comprehensive review and restructuring of the Security Council, in line with the spirit of achieving a broader base for decision-making through consensus and confidence-building, is clearly long overdue. Other critical issues in the reform process deserve further examination, with a view to restoring that body's dignity and legitimacy and strengthening the confidence and trust of the international community. Enlarging both the permanent and non-permanent categories while ensuring an equitable geographical distribution seems to be the way forward.

The Republic of the Marshall Islands remains committed to supporting the efforts by the Secretary-General and others to reform and streamline the mandates and activities of the United Nations and its other organizations and agencies. While the peacekeeping and general fund scales seem to be outdated, the process of reform must take seriously into account the limited responsibility and capacity of small island developing States such as the Marshall Islands to sustain their obligation in both categories. Also, now that this Organization stands at 189 Member States, 14 of them from the Pacific Region, the reconfiguration of our electoral grouping should be an additional matter to be placed on the table. It may be a complex one, but through our collective inspiration it can be an achievable goal, to be considered without further delay.

The Republic of the Marshall Islands is keen to further develop its ongoing active role and cooperation with the United Nations specialized agencies and programmes. In the view of the Marshall Islands, those bodies' efforts to make their operational activities more effective and responsive to the special needs of small island developing States will undoubtedly play a key role in the new millennium. The expansion of the Resident Coordinator programme — which brings it closer to home, where it belongs — is a case in point.

While the human rights achievements recorded in the 50 years since the proclamation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights must be acknowledged, there is a sense that much remains to be done before the world can truly claim that the Declaration has become a common standard of achievement. The Millennium Summit is a significant acknowledgement of the need for all States to work together, in a spirit of unity and cooperation, to ensure that the fruits of global development are shared and made more equitable and just for the benefit of humanity at large.

Within the mandate of its Charter to promote economic and social progress, peace and security, and sustainable development and prosperity, the United Nations is the only fully representative Organization capable of harmonizing our collective aspirations for a peaceful, stable and prosperous global village. The Republic of the Marshall Islands endorses Secretary-General Kofi Annan's report, "We the peoples: the role of the United Nations in the twenty-first century".

At the turn of the century, achievements have been realized, and this trend should be encouraged. Yet we are living under many threats. Acts of terrorism do not recognize national boundaries, and infectious diseases such as HIV/AIDS, malaria and tuberculosis are poised to spread quickly throughout the world. Our decisive and collective response is therefore more than ever required. In many developing countries, poverty and the deprivation of basic human rights, especially as concerns women and children, seem directly linked to, and escalate, crime.

We must also strive to eliminate weapons of mass destruction, especially nuclear weapons. The universality of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) and the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT) is a major concern.

Trafficking in drugs and small arms represents a considerable challenge and a major threat for small islands such as the Republic of the Marshall Islands, because of its geographic isolation and the fact that it lacks the required resources and capability to combat these phenomena. Our collective effort towards the creation of an effective global response to address all of these threats is urgently required.

We realize that global environmental degradation is of our own creation. The issue of global warming is a real threat to all, particularly to the Marshall Islands and to all small island developing States. There is no

doubt that the survival of populations and cultures is at stake.

The Marshall Islands has already lost metres of usable and habitable land due to climate change and sea-level rise, and the rate of loss is increasing. This is a matter of life and death. Implementing the legally binding commitments agreed in the Kyoto Protocol is the only significant step forward on the path of ensuring effective global action to combat climate change. There will be a terrible tragedy unless there is international cooperation. How will displaced populations — whatever the reasons for their being displaced — be able to enjoy and sustain their basic human rights for generations to come? Will their cultures and livelihoods be able to survive for the benefit of future generations?

Education and health are of paramount importance to every country in the world. Education is the key to the progress of any nation. We must collectively strive to ensure that an educated population makes up a healthy and prosperous society. I am pleased to report that the Government of the Republic of the Marshall Islands has taken some bold steps, by allocating the greatest amount of its limited resources towards the improvement of its education and health systems. I take this opportunity to appeal for the interest and support of the international community in joining us in this endeavour. I am particularly pleased to convey the deep appreciation of the Government of the Republic of the Marshall Islands to the Government of Italy for its generous support for our efforts to implement the Barbados Programme of Action. The first phase of the Marshall Islands solar energy project would not have been implemented without its support, through the United Nations Trust Fund for New and Renewable Sources of Energy. The interest in and support of the international community for the implementation of the other phases of the project would be highly appreciated.

The Marshall Islands National Nutrition and Children's Council has been very active since its inception. In addition to establishing task forces on food and nutrition, suicide prevention, substance abuse, neglect and disability, it made another significant contribution with the agriculture, food and nutrition policy, as the Marshall Islands strives to meet its obligations under the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Existing policies specifically aimed at the rights of the child are under review as we consider making the Convention a part of the Republic of the Marshall Islands legal system. A representative Commission on Sustainable Development has been established with the mandate of ensuring that the Barbados Programme of Action is implemented in all its aspects. Other legislation to curb illegal financial transactions will soon be introduced in the Parliament's current session.

These are some of the efforts being made by the Republic of the Marshall Islands as it strives to meet its treaty obligations and enhance the life of every citizen of the country. We cannot do it alone, and we appeal once again to the international community for support.

Let us have a United Nations that will meet the challenges of the twenty-first century.

The Acting President: We have heard the last speaker in the general debate for this meeting.

I shall now call on those representatives who wish to speak in exercise of the right of reply. May I remind members that statements in exercise of the right of reply are limited to 10 minutes for the first intervention and to five minutes for the second and should be made by delegations from their seats.

Mr. Al-Otaibi (Kuwait) (*spoke in Arabic*): My delegation listened carefully to the statement of the Foreign Minister of Iraq. We would like to briefly clarify the following points.

First, the Foreign Minister of Iraq accused Kuwait of providing logistical support to United States and United Kingdom aircraft committing aggression against Iraq. Such accusations are inaccurate, although we have often heard them from Iraq. They fall within the "misinformation campaign" undertaken for some weeks now by Iraq against Kuwait, thus increasing tension and instability in the region.

Secondly, the presence of foreign troops in Kuwait is governed by defence and security agreements signed bilaterally by Kuwait with the five permanent members of the Security Council to preserve its security and stability. Kuwait signed them as a result of the brutal Iraqi invasion — a flagrant violation of the United Nations Charter and of international law.

Thirdly, we wish to stress that Kuwait had not hosted any foreign forces before 2 August 1990. We had a principled and well-known position on that subject; however, the Iraqi invasion, as well as

continuous Iraqi threats and the lack of peaceful intentions on the part of the Iraqi regime, made it necessary for Kuwait to take such steps for the implementation of Security Council resolutions by Iraq and to preserve Kuwait's security and peace in the region.

Fourthly, as for the Iraqi Foreign Minister's claim that Iraq has fulfilled its commitments under relevant Security Council resolutions, we stated previously that certain principal commitments remain to be fulfilled by Iraq — mainly, freeing Kuwaiti prisoners of war, the return of stolen Kuwaiti property and the elimination of Iraq's weapons of mass destruction. The international community, which is represented by the Security Council, recognizes that many international and regional organizations unanimously agree that the Iraqi regime has yet to fulfil its obligations in order that sanctions against the long-suffering Iraqi people be lifted. We call on Iraq to implement all Security Council resolutions so that it can resume its place among the family of Arab and world States and so that this vital part of the world may regain its security and stability.

Mr. Eldon (United Kingdom): I would like to respond briefly to the remarks made today by the Secretary of State and Vice-Minister for Foreign Affairs of Argentina concerning the Falkland Islands.

The British Government does not accept the Secretary of State's remarks about sovereignty. We have no doubt about Britain's sovereignty over the Falkland Islands and the other British dependencies in the South Atlantic. Moreover, we have a duty to respect the right of self-determination of the people of the Falkland Islands, who have made clear their wish to remain British. The elected representatives of the islanders expressed their views clearly when they visited the United Nations for the debate in the Committee of 24 on 11 July this year. They asked the Committee to recognize that they, like any other democratic people, should be allowed to exercise the right of self-determination. As the democratic voice of the Falklands Islands people, they reiterated their view that they did not want to be part of Argentina.

Despite our differences with Argentina on the subject of sovereignty, we continue to strengthen our bilateral relations — including this year through meetings between Prime Minister Blair and President de la Rua and between our Foreign Ministers — and to build on the agreement signed last year on practical arrangements on matters of common interest in the South Atlantic. We are confident that our relations will continue to flourish in that spirit of cooperation and mutual interest.

Mr. Al-Humaimidi (Iraq) (*spoke in Arabic*): The statement made by the Foreign Minister of Iraq clearly outlined the manifestations and elements of the Anglo-American aggression against Iraq and the Kuwaiti role in that aggression. Kuwait bears the same legal responsibility as the United States, the United Kingdom, Saudi Arabia and Turkey.

We have not threatened Kuwait in our latest statements. Iraq does not threaten. What we did was inform the international community of Kuwait's involvement in daily aggression against Iraq and its attempts to harm our interests.

The no-fly zones represent an illegitimate use of force against an independent State and a breach of the United Nations Charter and international law. The official spokesman of the United Nations has stated that the no-fly zones are the result of a unilateral decision unrelated to the United Nations. A former Secretary-General of the United Nations has also stated that the no-fly zones have no basis in Security Council resolutions. The majority of permanent members of the Security Council consider the imposition of no-fly zones to be an illegitimate use of force. Kuwait's legal responsibility arising from its involvement in this daily aggression against Iraq is therefore clear and irrefutable. United States and United Kingdom aircraft take off daily from Kuwait, as reflected in the reports of the Special Commission.

The representative of Kuwait once again raised the issue of the missing, with the aim of politicizing this humanitarian issue. I would stress yet again that Iraq is holding no prisoners and has not interest in doing so. There are, however, missing Kuwaiti, Iraqi and other nationals. The efforts of the Tripartite Commission and the International Committee of the Red Cross to find these missing are being hampered by the insistence of the United States and the United Kingdom on being allowed to participate in the activities of these agencies and to politicize them, although those two countries have no missing nationals.

The representative of Kuwait raised the issue of Iraq's implementation of the Security Council's

resolutions. Iraq has fulfilled its obligations under those resolutions and the Security Council must now fulfil its own in return.

Mr. Cullen (Argentina) (*spoke in Spanish*): The Argentine Republic, having listened to the statement made in reply by the representative of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, wishes to reaffirm the ideas put forth in the statement made in the general debate this afternoon by Secretary of State and Vice-Minister for Foreign Affairs Enrique Candioti.

Mr. Al-Otaibi (Kuwait) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I apologize for seeking to speak for a second time, though briefly.

I should like to reaffirm our denial of the allegations made by the representative of Iraq. As to the threats made against Kuwait, which he denied, Iraq has been waging a campaign for several weeks, as I have mentioned, to increase instability and tension in the region. Most notable have been the accusations and threats made by an Iraqi official on the anniversary of the Iraqi invasion. Letters have been sent to the Secretary-General and issued as formal documents. The most recent threat was that made by the Iraqi Oil Minister, who accused Kuwait of sabotaging Iraqi oil installations. We in turn have sent letters to the President of the Security Council and to the Secretary-General that have also been issued as official documents.

As for Kuwaiti prisoners, what the Iraqi representative said is not new. All we ask is that Iraq fulfil its obligations under Security Council resolutions 686 (1991), 687 (1991) and 1284 (1999) and cooperate with the International Committee of the Red Cross. Let me recall that Iraq has been boycotting its meetings since December 1998. Iraq also refuses to cooperate with the Secretary-General's high-level coordinator pursuant to paragraph 14 of resolution 1284 (1999).

Finally, the Iraqi representative has repeatedly declared that all of Iraq's obligations have been discharged. What of its obligations under resolution 1284 (1999)? Iraq continues to refuse to implement that resolution.

Mr. Al-Humaimidi (Iraq) (*spoke in Arabic*): I apologize for asking for the floor again.

I repeat that Iraq has not waged such a campaign. We have pointed out the daily Kuwaiti and Saudi aggression against Iraq since 1991 and the attempts that have been made to sabotage our interests. Once again, the representative of Kuwait raised the issue of missing Kuwaiti nationals and I have responded to it. He also raised the issue of Iraq's implementation of Security Council 1284 (1999). I believe he did so at the behest of his masters.

The meeting rose at 7.30 p.m.